

BOOK REVIEWS: A PLETHORA OF BOOKS ON FUNGI?

Reviewed by David Ratkowsky

A Field Guide to Australian Fungi, by Bruce Fuhrer. Published by Bloomings Books, Melbourne, 2005. 360 pages. ISBN 1 876473 51 7.

Fungi Down Under: the Fungimap Guide to Australian Fungi, by Pat Grey and Ed Grey. Published by Fungimap, c/- Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, 2005. 146 pages. ISBN 0 646 44674 6.

A Field Guide to the Fungi of Australia, by A.M. Young. Published by the University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2005. 240 pages. ISBN 0 86840 742 9.

Never before have Australian naturalists with an interest in fungi had such a choice of guide books, with three new field guides published in 2005 at about the same time. The books are different in range and scope but all will be welcomed by those who aspire to put a name to a fungus that they may have seen in the bush or suburban garden.

Probably the most extensive and comprehensive of the three books that were launched this year is the one by Bruce Fuhrer, which covers ca. 500 species, all beautifully photographed with the care and attention to detail that we have come to expect from this author. Bruce's renown extends well beyond people with an interest in fungi, as he is the author and/or photographer of a diverse range of biological groups, such as Banksias, bryophytes and the marine life at seashores. The present book goes far beyond the content of his previous books on fungi (Fuhrer and Robinson 1992; Fuhrer 2001), whose text rarely contained more than a single sentence describing each species. The new book, which re-uses some of the same photographs in his *Field Companion*, contains more detail to help the reader identify the species, almost always providing information on spore print colour, spore size, shape and surface ornamentation, if any. The other engaging feature was the author's willingness to include large numbers of the more unfamiliar, less commonly photographed species, even if some could not always be named to species level. Thus, the Fuhrer book covers representatives of all the various kinds of fungi, i.e. gilled fungi, fleshy and woody pore fungi, coral- and club-fungi, puffballs, spine fungi, shelf fungi, jelly fungi, disc- and cup-fungi, with a few slime moulds thrown in to round off the

work. It is a highly successful effort and is likely to be the one work that the field mycologist will want to consult most frequently in search of a name. No book is error-free, and the publisher has probably not served the author well by allowing a production editor to misname the beautiful cover photograph of *Mycena nargan*, a purplish black species, as *Mycena nivalis*, which is a species with a snow-white cap. Cystidia is also misspelled in the inside front and back covers, and the photograph of *Coprinus comatus* facing p. 1 is misidentified as *Coprinus atramentarius*. Publishers must learn that authors need to be given the whole book to proof-read, not just the text material from p. 1 onwards.

The scope of *Fungi Down Under* is entirely different, being confined only to the 100 target species of the Fungimap project. This special project was initiated jointly in 1995 by the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria as a means of providing Australia-wide distribution maps for this continent's larger fungi. As the majority of Australian macrofungi are yet to be named and described, the project had to be confined to a fixed number of target species, chosen for their ease of identification in the field, without recourse to microscopic examination. Volunteers throughout Australia, mainly amateurs, were encouraged to send in records of these target species, and many thousands of records were received. For the production of the book, and for a CD-ROM that preceded it, people were asked to contribute photographs, habitat information and the precise location where the specimen was found. This provided Pat and Ed Grey with a lot of choice of photographs to select, and they skilfully compiled the text and species descriptions at their disposal. Leon Costermans, who designed and edited the book, digitally prepared the photographs and artwork for printing, resulting in an attractive layout, with each of the 100 target species assigned a whole page of the book. Often, each species is allotted more than one photo, and each has a distribution map of Australia with red dots indicating the localities at which the species was recorded. The book is informative, pleasant to look at and to read, and thoroughly achieves its objective, and should inspire naturalists who have not as yet become involved in Fungimap to do so in the future.

The third book under review, the field guide by A.M. (Tony) Young, is a thoroughly revised version of his previous book, *Common Australian Fungi*, the last revision of which appeared in 2000. This is a substantially different effort, and much more successful than that one, bringing the nomenclature up-to-date so that the species names now conform largely to those that appear in the other two books under review and to the names that are generally found in the mycological literature. For this book, Tony collaborated with Kay Smith,

who painted 23 watercolours and prepared more than 260 line drawings. While these paintings and drawings certainly help contribute to species identification, those of us who believe that a good photograph is hard to beat would like to have seen more than the 36 colour photos that were included in this work and confined to a section in the centre of the book. Generally, the treatment of each species ends with a distribution giving the Australian States in which the species are known to appear. It is lamentable to see Tasmania “left off the map” as frequently as it is in this book. While the author may be forgiven for overlooking two papers on the fungi of Mt. Wellington that appeared in the *Papers & Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* in 2002 and 2004, there is less excuse for his not obtaining access to the extensive Fungimap records prior to publication, which would have showed that the target species *Amanita xanthocephala*, *Fistulina hepatica*, *Hericium coralloides*, *Marasmius elegans*, *Mycena viscidocruenta*, *Plectania campylospora*, *Tremella fuciformis*, *T. mesenterica* and *Xerula radicata* have been frequently reported from this island. Hopefully, these and other omissions can be corrected in the next revision of the book.

Together with Ian McCann’s field guide and the little “Bush Book” of Richard Robinson, both published in 2003, the Australian fungus enthusiast now has a big choice of recent books to choose from. Is there a plethora of choice, i.e. a surfeit, an excess of these books? For those of us for whom fungi are the main subject of interest in the natural environment, the choice is extremely welcome, especially when compared to the situation a decade ago. The three books on offer here may appeal to different markets, at least to some extent. Bruce Fuhrer’s book is certainly the most comprehensive, but is focussed on the regions of Australia that experience high autumn and winter rainfall. Tony Young’s book will be relevant to residents of Queensland and northern New South Wales, as it includes many species that are found mainly or exclusively in that part of Australia. *Fungi Down Under* will be sought after by those who wish to be part of the Fungimap project, but whose interest in fungi doesn’t extend beyond that project. Surely it is a welcome situation to have such a choice.

REFERENCES

- Fuhrer, B.A. (2001). *A Field Companion to Australian Fungi*. Revised Edition, Bloomings Books, Hawthorn, Victoria. 162 pp.
- Fuhrer, B.A. and Robinson, R. (1992). *Rainforest Fungi of Tasmania and South-East Australia*. CSIRO, Australia and the Forestry Commission, Tasmania. 95 pp.
- McCann, I.R. (2003). *Australian Fungi Illustrated*. Macdown Productions,

Vermont, Victoria. 128 pp.

Robinson, R. (2003). *Fungi of the South-West Forests*. Department of Conservation and Land Management, Kensington, Western Australia. 72 pp.