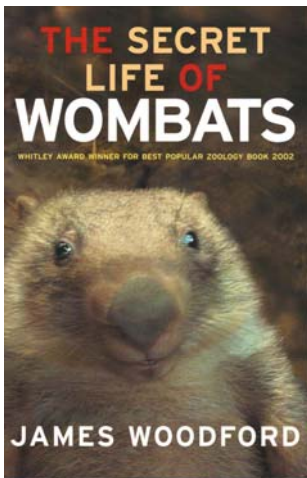


## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Secret Life of Wombats** by James Woodford, *The Text Publishing Company*, reprinted 2006, paperback, 229 pages.

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It is one of the great regrets of my life that when a school friend offered me a baby wombat to raise I couldn't take it. My mother had heard that wombats could lean against a fence until it fell over so she felt that maybe a wombat wasn't a good pet for a suburban garden!



Several years ago there was a fascinating TV program about Peter Nicholson, who had explored the burrows of wombats while a schoolboy so when I saw the book *The Secret Life of Wombats* by James Woodford it was a ‘must have’. Although not a recent publication (it was written in 2001 and earned its author the Whitley Award for best popular zoology book for 2002) it has been reprinted several times and is an engrossing tale of “wombatting” woven around the story of the young Peter Nicholson during his time at the Timbertop campus of Geelong Grammar in 1960. During his year at Timbertop he carried out what is still considered to be one of the best studies of the underground lives of wombats. He did this by creeping out of his dormitory at night and crawling down burrows, exploring and mapping them, and observing the habits of their owners.

Woodford has met and travelled to the study sites of Australian wombat experts and has actually seen a northern hairy-nosed wombat – a most elusive beast. His section on the history of the European discovery of the wombat conveys graphically the sense of amazement felt at the first sight of such a strange animal and the difficulty early taxonomists had in describing it. *The Secret Life of Wombats* is very readable and full of fascinating details – did you know that a wombat can run 100 metres in less than 10 seconds?

And if you know a small person who is interested in animals they might like Jackie French's *Diary of a Wombat* (Angus & Roberston, reprinted 2007), a delightful board book for young readers about a week in the life of a wombat – it is a great book to read to a child!