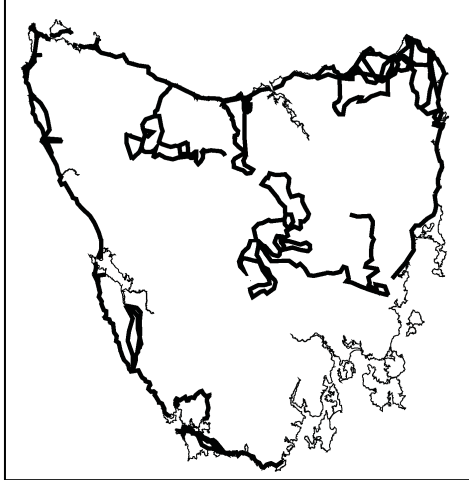


commenced falling to decay about three years ago. Probably their stated period for growth had arrived as they are for the chief part stunted trees, or it might be blight, or the continual burnings of the natives have tended to hasten it. So fast are they falling to decay that the ground is covered with dead timber and the top branches of trees was heard falling as we journeyed along. The natives caught numerous opossums today. This animal is in abundance. (p. 533)



Circular Head [Stanley], 30
May 1832

It rained incessant during the whole of this night and whilst at Circular Head there had been continual rains. Mr Curr said for the whole time he had been at Circular Head he had never known so much rain as there had been this season. (p. 643)

Some of Robison's journeys (heavy black lines), compiled from route maps in *Friendly Mission*.

The new edition of *Friendly Mission* is very reasonably priced (8.5 cents a page!) and I recommend it highly to Tasmanian naturalists State-wide.

*Gardam, F. (ed.) *Immense Enjoyment. The Illustrated Journals and Letters of William L. Wells 1884-1888. The Life of an Early Quaker Family in Tasmania.* Devon Historical Society, Devonport). ISBN 0 9593219 1 8.

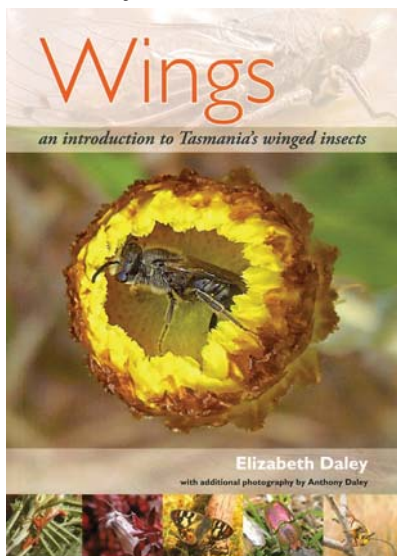
Wings: An Introduction to Tasmania's Winged Insects by Elizabeth Daley, Riffles Pty Ltd, 2007, softback, 236 pages (ISBN 978 0 9804006 2 5)

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In this eclectic book the author, Elizabeth Daley, has made a valiant attempt to give us a compact introduction and field guide to Tasmania's bewildering array of winged insects. There was a gap in the market, and this book fills it. In any other developed nation, there would have been no gap by this stage of the twenty-first century, and this book would have had to compete with many others on a similar theme. But this is Australia – biologically megadiverse (even the tiny portion of its

land surface that is Tasmania), yet chronically under-endowed with taxonomists able to formally describe our fauna, and with a restricted market of naturalists into which to sell books of this nature.

As the author tells us in the introduction, she is fascinated by insects, and we are the beneficiaries: if you weren't interested in insects when you picked up this book, you will be before you put it down again. She is wise to subtitle the book 'an introduction'. Otherwise, she would have set herself a hopeless task: Tasmania's insects are just so diverse that no single tome could do them justice. Her work-



around to this is to refer the reader to other, more weighty, works on individual insect-groups as required.

The photos collectively depict an extraordinary range of creatures that go about their lives more or less under our very noses. The choice of subjects for the photos is a little quirky, and may to some extent reflect the species that the author came across serendipitously while out-and-about. But if she came across them in the course of a naturalist's wanderings, then so might the reader. Image quality also varies enormously – some are spot-on, while the most charitable thing to say about others is that they do a great job of conveying the truth that insects are for the most part small, constantly-moving and difficult-to-

photograph creatures. The text accompanying each photo is rather minimalist, sometimes leaving the reader hungry for more information (e.g. why is the cattle-poisoning sawfly so-called?). However, each insect-group gets more expansive coverage as a whole, detailing typical life-cycles, feeding and other aspects of natural history, plus how to find some of the species.

But despite my appreciation that a book like this has finally come along, I remain ambivalent about its likely impact on a generation of Tasmanian naturalists. In covering a topic of this complexity, it's difficult to strike a balance between being overly scientific and dumbing down; between ensuring comprehensive coverage of particular taxa, and giving people a little taster of everything. This book has tried to capture both ends of the market as well as the ground in between – perhaps an impossible feat without compromising some of the science and something of the appeal for the interested layperson. So on the one hand, the book has the potential to inform and to inspire, while on the other, it has the potential to misinform, and

leave readers under the misapprehension that they can use the book to put a name to some insects which are essentially only identifiable by experts.

The author makes a welcome attempt at inclusiveness through the use of English names for insects, but sometimes these result in a ‘folk-taxonomy’ that is not only unscientific, it’s actually undermining of science. For instance, there is one section dedicated to beetles, but then another on weevils. Being arranged in alphabetical order at this level, beetles come near the beginning of the book (after bees), while weevils are at the end. Any naturalist worth their salt (including the author of this book) knows that weevils are a taxonomic sub-set of beetles. It doesn’t do anybody any favours pandering to ignorance by pretending they are two different sets of life-forms of equal rank. A similar logic (or lack of it) applies to the separation of cicadas from the rest of the bugs, while bees, ants and wasps are given separate treatment despite their taxonomic relatedness to each other, as are butterflies and moths, and crickets, grasshoppers and katydids. And talking of which, do we have to suffer the use of that peculiar word ‘katydid’? While it sounds almost scientific, it is no more than alliteration – it refers to the sound made by one particular species living thousands of kilometres from these shores in North America. What’s wrong with ‘bush-cricket’? Though English in origin, it could have been made for the Australian environment.

I digress. The use of folk-taxonomy continues down to the level of individual species – or perhaps I should say species-groups, because the use of English names is indiscriminate. I’m all for inventing apposite English names for species that lack them, but in this book, their use is inconsistent. Sometimes the English name is as unique as a species binomial; sometimes it looks that way but then further on the same name is used for another species (e.g. jewel beetle; Christmas beetle). The matter is further complicated by the level of precision of the scientific name itself. Sometimes a photo is accompanied by a full species binomial, sometimes just by a generic name. I deliberately use the word ‘precision’ rather than ‘accuracy’, because not every photo is ascribed its correct and current scientific name (and in the case of the ‘carpetbag geometrid moth’, no scientific name at all). I concede that this is inevitable in a book of this nature, and I am sure the author has done her best to minimise misidentifications. Sometimes I suspect that, in any case, the photos lack the necessary identification features (bristles on forelegs, teeth on mandibles, etc.) for even an expert to name with any certainty, so I have to assume that the author followed her own advice about collecting the specimen for later formal identification by an expert. In any book likely to be used as an identification guide, incorrectly named species can spawn many subsequent misidentifications, which can undermine the natural-history-recording endeavours of a generation. The author recognises this as a possibility and warns against relying too much on the names – but I fear many users will miss this piece of advice by skipping over the introduction.

A case in point is the beetle *Echnolagria rufescens*, which in this book (and in many reference collections) is known as *E. grandis*. It transpires, however, that that name is correctly applied to a species occurring on the Australian mainland only. This book was not the source of the error, but it perpetuates it. More pertinently, this book introduces several new naming errors. I am informed by Lynne Forster that the flea-beetle species named on page 38 as the introduced *Altica pagana* is actually a native, probably undescribed, species (which in the Tasmanian Forest Insect Collection at Forestry Tasmania goes by the code-name *Arsipoda* TFIC sp 02). Likewise the leaf-beetle on page 37 is *Calomela curtisi*, not *C. maculicollis*. Lynne mentioned some other species to me which also appear to be misidentified in this book. Meanwhile, Michael Driessen informs me that the photo on page 139 is not a yellow-winged locust but is a species of *Austroicetes*, and that this is but one of several errors in the Orthoptera department.

On the plus side, I found very few spelling errors, but I did notice two in a caption accompanying some photos of weevils on page 233 (*Aoplocnemis* is misspelled *Aoplacnemis*, and *Laemosaccus* is misspelled *Laemossaccus*. Fortunately both species are given their correct spelling in the text accompanying their main photos on pages 228 and 229 respectively. Lynne additionally picked up a misspelling on page 50, where *Ptilocnemus femoralis* is spelt as *P. femoratus*.

Back to the book's title – *Wings*. It's the sort of title that would suit a novel about an obsessive butterfly-collector, or a book of insect poetry perhaps. But for the current book, what would be wrong with promoting the subtitle to full title status in lieu of the existing one? Ah, there is one problem – not all the insects in the book are winged, or at least capable of flight (e.g. the similarly-named yet different Tasmanian grasshopper and Tassie hopper).

In summary, this book admirably delivers what its subtitle promises – it introduces the reader to Tasmania's winged insects (and a few others besides). But if your intention is to put a name to some of Tasmania's wonderful insect fauna, then use this book with caution.

Cherry-eye Cicada or Red-eye Cicada *Psaltoda moerens*

FAMILY Cicadidae
LENGTH OF FOREWING 4.9–6.0 cm
DISTRIBUTION Eastern Tas within 30 km of the sea; also found in south-eastern Qld, NSW and Vic
HABITAT Open bushland, suburban gardens
FOOD Nymphs and adults feed on the sap of a variety of trees
FLIGHT PERIOD November to February

