

## BOOK REVIEWS

### FUTURE OF THE FAUNA OF WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

1994. Edited by D. Lunney, S. Hand, P. Reed and D. Butcher.  
Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, Mosman. 240 pages,  
(\$45 from Surrey Beatty & Sons)

This book originated from a symposium of the same name held during March 1991. Its principle aim was to assess western NSW from a zoological viewpoint. The resulting proceedings does so, but also from an historical perspective. This is the book's strength as well as its weakness. In the first and last chapters, Lunney has extensively reviewed and summarised the 1901 Royal Commission that inquired into the condition of the Crown Tenants of the Western Division of New South Wales. This Commission report is often cited but I imagine that few have actually read it; there are only a few copies outside of the State Library of New South Wales. Lunney also provides excerpts from the unpublished Joint Parliamentary Committee of NSW (1984) inquiry into the Western Division as well as material from the recent NSW Conservation and Land Management Search Conferences (1992, 1993). These summaries provide a valuable governmental perspective on the history and current social, economic and environmental conditions in western NSW. The critical historical perspective provided by the 1901 report is complemented by Denny's account of retracing the steps of the early explorers.

The early governmental reports made references only to fauna in terms of the impact of rabbits and sheep; kangaroos are a focus of more recent accounts. This gap is filled by reviews of the past and current status of birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates. A uniform theme throughout these reviews is just how little is known. There is a paucity of historical or contemporary survey data regarding the fauna of western NSW. What is known is that only half of the terrestrial mammals have persisted in the Western Division. The birds have fared no better - 103 species and subspecies have declined, and six are now presumed extinct in the Division. Both Schodde's and Smith and Smith's avian reviews are enhanced by detailed appendices of geographic affinity and status.

Not all is doom and gloom. Palmer, based on his own family's experience living in the Western Division, states that there are strong signs of recovery in many areas. He rightfully points out that the days when 25,000 sheep watered at one bore are long since gone. However, he, like Newsome, strongly contend that there is still much room for improvement in terms of reducing feral herbivores and exotic predators.

This collection of reviews adds much detail of current and historical conditions, but provides few specific recommendations to maintain or improve the status of fauna in Western NSW. Most authors plea for more systematic and detailed surveys. This is valid in the sense that, as Lunney claims, faunal abundance and diversity are likely good indicators of ecological sustainability. Briggs provides one of the few specific recommendations: landholders ought to be financially supported to meet the dual goals of production and conservation. Without public support, production goals are too often met at the expense of conservation. Briggs rightfully points out the "field of conservation development is ripe for lateral thinking and practical achievement".

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