

The dingo in Australia and Asia

Laurie Corbett (1995)

Kangaroos: biology of the largest marsupials

Terence Dawson (1995)

Publisher: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, Sydney, ISBN 086840230 & ISBN 0868403172 respectively, \$25 ea.

I review these two books together because they have instructive links and similarities between them. Both books demonstrate the importance of understanding basic biology and ecology for the management of the species themselves and the ecosystems they inhabit. If the knowledge represented in these two books did not exist, the management and social value of kangaroos, dingoes and the land they inhabit would be poor indeed.

It is through the research of these authors and their many students and colleagues during the past 30 years that we've gained a rich appreciation of the dynamics of these National icons, one holds a noble presence on the Coat of Arms, the other has been the scourge of pastoralists for centuries. This is the first scientific monograph solely on dingoes and Corbett's sweeping account does much to dispel the ignorant prejudice many in our communities still hold against the dingo.

Dawson's book is a timely addition to an ever growing literature on kangaroos. His account highlights the remarkable features of the kangaroo, particularly the adaptations of the arid zone species to environmental extremes of temperature, aridity and feed availability.

Both authors provide important perspectives on better ways of living with kangaroos and dingoes. Corbett provides a number of case studies of how accepting the presence of dingoes can be tolerable or even improve the long term ecological and economic sustainability of cattle enterprises. Baiting and trapping dingoes can be counter-productive. Killing dingoes has been shown to disrupt dominant female infanticide, thus enhancing recruitment, predation and stock losses. Further, without dingoes, there is evidence that kangaroos, goats, and rabbits rapidly rebound after drought.

Our improved knowledge of kangaroos described by Dawson clearly shows that the conservation of these species is secure. They are a renewable resource that have a suite of reproductive, physiological and behavioural adaptations that allow them to survive the vagaries of drought and rapidly respond to the benefits of rain, water troughs and the absence of dingoes.

Both books are volumes in UNWS Press's Australian Natural History Series and they share similarities in style and layout. Neither are technical treatises full of references, but are rather clearly written books easily followed by a wide readership. Terry Dawson, in particular, enlivens the text with personal observations or those of his students and immediate colleagues. The lack of references within the texts is an irritation at times to a researcher like myself, but adequate referencing is provided at the end of the books under separate chapter headings. The texts are richly illustrated with figures, plates and tables; there are few two-page spreads without them. The chapters are clearly broken down into sections with informative headings. These books are pleasures to read in detail or simply browse. These volumes are excellent value for anyone's library on rangelands and the fascinating species in them.

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