2010 Whitley Awards

The Royal Zoological Society of NSW presented the winners of the 2010 Whitley Awards on Friday 24th September 2010 at a ceremony in the foyer of the Australian Museum in Sydney.

The Whitley Awards are for outstanding publications dealing with the promotion and conservation of Australasian fauna. Of the awards, the Whitley Medal is the most sought after prize in Australian zoological publishing.

The Whitley Awards, first presented in 1979, are a tribute to Gilbert Whitley (1903-1975), who was the Curator of Fishes at the Australian Museum from 1922 to 1964. For many years, Whitley was also the editor of the Society's publications and a very active member of council.

This year's Whitley Medal winner is:

A Guide to the Beetles of Australia by George Hangay and Paul Zborowski: CSIRO Publishing, April 2010, ISBN 9780643094871, $44.95

The book follows the very successful format of previous CSIRO insect guidebooks: dragonflies, katydids, moths and butterflies. They are designed to bridge the gap between popular natural history and academic treatise. But this latest book leaves the others for dead in the daunting scope of the project. While insects make up 75% of animal species on Earth, over 40% of insects are beetles. About 20 000 species of beetles have been described from Australia, which in reality represents only the tip of the iceberg. The earlier chapters deal with the distinguishing features of beetles, beetle anatomy, physiology, reproduction and development. The diversity sections covers over 80% of the families of beetles found in Australia. While both authors are based in Australia, they have studied insects from many parts of the world and hence can put the Australian fauna into a world context. The text is beautifully illustrated by numerous high-quality photographs, most of which were taken by Paul Zborowski. Paul is also the co-author of the Whitley Medal winning Field Guide to Insects of Australia.

Noel Tait (Macquarie University).

The Awards also include **Certificates of Commendation** and this year these were awarded to the following 14 publications:

Children's Story

Journey of the Sea Turtle by Mark Wilson: Lothian Children's Books, May 2009, ISBN 9780734411099, $16.99

Conservation is a trade-off between what we need and what wildlife needs. We have to give wildlife a place to be, and it's only when we see the consequences of when we take over that we begin to see that wildlife needs to have its place. So Conservation action only happens when people have empathy for the organisms involved and the best place to state that engagement is with kids - the next generation of stewards of the world's wildlife.

Journey of Sea Turtle tells the story of a mother leatherback turtle facing the challenges of living with humans - the same challenge faced by thousands of species around the globe. We follow the turtle from egg, to emerging from the nest, surviving the race to the water and growth into a mother herself, searching for her home beach to continue the life cycle. The problem is that a new marina has consumed the beach and the breeding grounds, leaving the mother with nowhere to go. She becomes trapped in a net, caught in a storm and only by luck is she freed and happens upon a new beach.

I told the story to my son Harry who is going on five and loves wildlife. Like all powerful kid's books, he got the message and when I asked him what he thought he said: 'Animals need space too, we need to make space for them so we can live together".

It's books like these with simple but significant messages that are grounded in reality that build the strong conservation ethics that our future society needs if we are to keep space for our wildlife.

As such, *Journey of the Sea Turtle* is a worthy winner of the Whitely Commendation for Children's Story and I congratulate the author and the publishers for a beautifully produced book with wonderful illustrations and an engaging and effective conservation message.

Peter Banks (University of NSW)

Children's Educational Series

The Secret Life of Caterpillars and All about Ants by Densey Clyne: Young Reed, an imprint of New Holland, July 2009 & February 2010, ISBN 9781921073618 & 9781921073601, $19.95

Densey has a long history of writing natural history books. Her writing style is easy going and in a conversational style but she still gets the information across. She doesn't shy from using scientific terms on occasion but does bother to give a good explanation of what they mean and why they are important. She also likes to 'play' with words and as a result there are clever choices of words in the text and captions, such as 'the worm turns', 'a change for the bigger' and 'blueprints for survival'. *The Secret Life of Caterpillars* or What an Ant is Not and 'the underground movement' and 'fakes and phonies' in *All about Ants*. However, she is not above using some real groaners in the pun world too. All this text is of course backed up by her excellent photos. She has endless patience and will wait for a chance to take a photo of what she is talking about rather than using a portrait shot and saying 'this animal does this' without the evidence being shown. It must have taken many hours and downright good luck to produce the stunning shot of a tiny winged queen ant carrying a live mealy bug to found her honeydew-producing herd when and if she establishes a new nest. Although these books are aimed at younger readers, I know quite a few adult entomologists who have them as well so they can peruse these remarkable photos and show them to people as examples of insect ways of life in an easily explained manner.

All in all a well deserved Whitely Commendation to Densey Clyne and Young Reed publishers.

Martyn Robinson (Australian Museum)

Field Guide

Field Guide to Sea Stingers and other Venomous and Poisonous Marine Invertebrates of Western Australia by Loisette Marsh and Shirley Slack-Smith: Western Australian Museum Press, August 2009, ISBN 9781920843953, $35

This is 2nd edition, the first was published in 1986, so considerable changes have been made since then, primarily in the inclusion of more photos many of which were taken by Clay Bryce of the WAM who is not actually thanked in the acknowledgements, obviously an oversight.

I know the two authors well. Loisette Marsh was the Curator of echinoderms and corals at the WAM- although she has retired for some years but is still actively researching. Shirley is the Curator of molluscs at the WAM.

Obviously the research interests of Loisette and Shirley shine though the book with extensive chapters devoted to molluscs and echinoderms. They provide very useful information on the identification and the habitats of dangerous animals. They also provide some very informative medical advice to treating stings and bites, supplied by a medical practitioner Dr Desmond Gurry. The final chapters provide details as to how to administer CPR while waiting for an ambulance.

Obviously there are some very nasty invertebrates out there, although most of them are cryptic and will only do nasty things to you if you actually pick them up and annoy them.

For some groups, they have included animals that I would consider irritating at worst but hardly very dangerous. For example the eunicid polychaete is far more likely to retract rapidly into its burrow than to stay around to bite you, that is of course if you are not trying to catch one to determine its true identity, which of course I did in the Kimberley. However, there are some aggressive and dangerous marine animals, such as jelly fish, including the box jellyfish Chironex and Irukandji stinger, which are potentially life threatening and difficult to see in the water. So precaution is needed, such as wearing stinger suits or avoiding going in the water when signs tell you not too. Of course there is the blue ringed octopus but again you actually have to pick one up in order to be bitten and this can be lethal.

So this is an important field guide that gives very useful and substantiated information. It is reassuring that both authors admit to having been diving and swimming for decades with no serious injuries. Common sense should be used especially when diving or swimming in remote waters, which includes much of Western Australia. While concentrating on WA, much of what is written is applicable to other parts of Australia especially tropical Northern Territory and Queensland.

Pat Hutchings (Australian Museum)

Regional Guide

Where to See Birds in Victoria edited by Tim Dolby, Penny Johns and Sally Symonds: Birds Australia and Jacana Books (Allen & Unwin), October 2009, ISBN 9781741757361, $35

Well it was not for the want of trying but this beaut little book seems to have fallen between the cracks. The editors and contributors are of course based in Victoria, who else to produce an authoritative guide to the birds of Victoria. But none of them was able to be at tonight's presentation. Compounding this, my resident bird presenters were otherwise engaged – no doubt it is spring and the birds have sprung. I heard my first Koel and I think my first Channel-billed Cuckoo today. All this aside, and you are interested in birds and you are going to Victoria then this is the book for you. So it will be in demand. Victoria is a small state but it packs in a lot of birds in a diverse range of environments; snow covered high country, Mountain Ash forests, coastal heathlands, wetlands and arid regions. The first half of

the book deals with the regions of Victoria and their bird faunas. Then follows a compendium of the birds of Victoria.

Birds Australia is a great organization producing their iconic journal *Wingspan* together with a variety of publications like this gem and culminating in the mighty and definitive *Birds of Australia* volumes. We commend the editors, contributors and publishers of *Where to See Birds in Victoria* for the Whitley Regional Guide Certificate of Commendation.

Noel Tait (Macquarie University)

Popular Zoology

Australian Wildlife – Unique and Unusual by Karin Cox and photographs by Steve Parish: Steve Parish Publishing, October 2009, ISBN 9781740217415, $34.95

It can automatically be assumed that anything under the signature of Steve Parrish Publishing will be amply illustrated with exquisite wildlife photographs by the master himself. When Steve tells the reader that "this book is a portfolio of some of my favourite images of Australian wildlife" – it can be assumed that the reader is about to witness the exceptional. There is no disappointment in this book. There is nothing mundane or oh-hum about the photography. All of the photos are unique. Whether the subject is the "inconspicuous and rarely seen" (native rodents); the "merry, merry king of the bush" (kookaburras); the "fruit-eating fliers" (megabats); the "flamboyant bluffers" (frilled lizard); the "armoured jewels" (beetles); the "movers and shakers" of the marine environment (the mobile invertebrates); or the "sleek and cheeky" (sea-lions) – the photos are truly sensational.

What a challenge for the author of the text to complement such excellence. Karin Cox achieves what many would consider a huge challenge. She tells the stories of the animals in words that complement the photographs beautifully. Karin's succinct and factual text, interwoven with wit, make the book not just a feast for the eyes but also very readable and informative.

Let me give you an example of the details that Karin can cram into the small spaces left around the photos. In just two short elegantly written paragraphs she provides a wealth of information on the "stealthy watchers". The goannas or monitor lizards are robust, and the Australian fauna encompasses approximately half the world's 58 monitor species. This includes Australia's largest lizard, the perentie, which may reach 2.4 m and 15 kg. Despite being "beautiful and intricately patterned animals" the goannas are "surprisingly fearsome and often boldly confront humans at campsites". However, with "prolonged challenge they will usually retreat to the nearest tall tree" to wait for the opportunity to scavenge from the human leftovers. We are told of their unique way of surveying their surroundings by drawing themselves up on their back legs to full height, and their diet, including how water monitors "loiter" by wetlands and include fish in their diet. For the rest of the information that Karin has crammed into about 200 words you will have to read the book for yourself.

But there is more than such informative profiles and fabulous photos, the book finishes with messages about the threats to the unique and species diverse Australian wildlife accompanied by a series of photos of zoologists at work, the need for education of the next generation (more photos) and to protect habitat (even more photos).

This team, Steve Parrish and Karin Cox, have provided a very special book that has something for everyone from toddler to the aged, Australian or visitor. *Australian Wildlife: Unique and Unusual* is an extremely worthy recipient of the 2010 Whitley Commendation for Popular Zoology.

Shelley Burgin (University of Western Sydney)

Urban Zoology

The Possum-Trail Tree: Understanding Possums through Citizen Science by Philip Roetman and Christopher Daniels, illustrated by Ross Bateup: Barbara Hardy Centre for sustainable Urban Environments, University of SA, ISBN 9780646521992, October 2009, $29.95.

Possums- you either love them or hate them. Town folk decry possums when they eat their favourite roses or make a mess of an open garbage bin, but they also take great delight when a wide-eyed whiskered face peers in through the back window at night, looking for a handout meal. Country folk, hardened by a tough life of living off the land, also deplore possums for stripping their fruit trees or garden plants, but often leave apple cores or tidbits near the old hollow tree to feed the local possums.

Australia is one of the most heavily urbanised countries in the world and for many citizens the only native mammals that they are likely to encounter are possums. Many people have encounters with possums and are pleased that some animals appear to be able to cope with urban sprawl. But their understanding of possums and possum biology may not be great.

The realisation that possums have this unique relationship with people was recognised by Professor Chris Daniels from the University of South Australia. Chris had been presenting wildlife talks on the local ABC radio show for a few years and realised that there is an untapped

well of people who have brief encounters with wildlife and want to know more. From this *Operation Possum* begun. Members of the public were asked to participate, via an online survey, to contribute information about possums, where they were and how people interacted with them. Over two thousand people responded, many of them contributing stories and yarns about their possum experiences. *The Possum-Tail Tree* was born.

All who contributed to *Operation Possum* would love to read *The Possum-Tail Tree*. It contains not only their stories, but also the stories from a host of other people. Phillip Roetman and Chris Daniels edited many of these stories and blended the survey data with some solid natural history and biology of possums. The resulting mix is a very friendly and amusing way to promote native wildlife.

Many people are disinclined to purchase academic or detailed works about animal species despite having an inherit interest in them. *Possum–Tail Tree* is a gentle introduction to people/animal interactions. Phillip and Chris have christened this "citizen science". There is science in the approach as the observations and data are valid, but the science is diffused and non-threatening. *Possum-Tail Tree* opens the door to natural history for a large number of people who would normally shy well away from this topic- in this respect it is an important practical portal to the wonderful world of zoology.

I congratulate Phillip Roetman, Chris Daniels and all those involved in *Project Possum* and the subsequent compilation of *The Possum-Tail Tree*.

Arthur White (Environmental Consultant)

Interactive Resource

REDMAP (Range Extension Database and Mapping Project) website www.redmap.org.au by Gretta Pecl (project leader): Tasmanian Aquaculture & Fisheries Institute (University of Tasmania), December 2009.

REDMAP (Range Expansion Database and Mapping Project) is a web-based facility that allows industry and the general public to log and map fish sightings, which are added to a database that can be accessed by anyone. Australia has an enormous coastline that is impossible to monitor using traditional methods to reveal how the distributions of species are shifting in response to climate change. However, we have over 3 million recreational fishermen, thousands of commercial fishers and many thousands of keen SCUBA divers providing the potential for millions of people to scour Australian waters for evidence of how our marine ecosystems are responding to climate change. These individuals provide a large volume of high quality, verifiable observations (i.e. photography) at a fraction of the cost of traditional monitoring programs.

Members of the public can submit data on catches/observations of key species that may be impacted by climate change. The proposal is to extend REDMAP to cover the entire Australian coastline.

The success of REDMAP is due to a number of factors:

- An engaging website with clear project branding
- Immediate display of most reported data (photos are displayed only after scientific verification)
- Individual feedback provided for sightings with photos
- Recognition of contributions on the website and in project newsletters
- Clear acknowledgement and valuing of industry and community knowledge
- Fishers love talking about what they caught and divers love taking photos

I have great pleasure in presenting the Interactive Resources Commendation to *REDMAP*.

Mark McGrouther (Australian Museum)

Environmental Zoology

At the End of the River: the Coorong and Lower Lakes by David Paton: Australian Theological Forum Ltd Press, February 2010, ISBN 9781921511660, $49.95

In 2007, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, as it was then called, funded us to do aerial surveys of the Lower Lakes and the Coorong. I was stunned at the size, complexity and variation of the system. There were the large turbid freshwater lakes and the contrastingly highly reflective water of the 110 km long Coorong, which increased in reflectance as the salinity increased from the North to the South Coorong.

David Paton's book, *The End of the River,* beautifully captures this in its wide array of excellent photographs scattered throughout the book. But this isn't a coffee-table book. There is a wonderful compilation of the ecology of the system from the *Ruppia* beds, zooplankton, fish and water birds and how they are inextricably linked.

Back to our aerial surveys, the numbers of water birds that we counted were astounding even for someone who has spent most of their life counting water birds. We estimated a quarter of a million water birds in 2007 including more than 50 species. I will never forget the dense wheeling flocks of banded stilts. They were so packed in that we counters had to ratchet up instantaneous counts of 1,000 or more from the plane.

As well as the science and photographs in the book, I really like the rich tapestry of people stories woven through the pages from the original inhabitants through to the people who make their livelihoods from the system, such as fisherman. You really get a sense of the diversity as well as the change in the system.

So finally, David also tackles the elephant in the room, the drying up of the system. The drying back of the lakes has led to the exposure of acid sulphate soils, which can produce sulphuric acid when exposed to air. Also the salinity has been rising inexorably because the freshwater has just not been coming. The Government will release the Basin plan on the 8th October and this is probably the one shot in the locker that will restore the health of the Murray-Darling Basin. David's work, much of it caught in this book, has undoubtedly made a substantial contribution to the decision-making and obviously the long-term future of this system. I congratulate him on this Whitley Award.

Richard Kingsford (University of NSW)

Conservation Zoology

Amazing Facts about Australian Wildlife Conservation by Karin Cox and photographs by Steve Parish: Steve Parish Publishing, May 2009, ISBN 9781741932973, $19.95

While all the books presented for awards fulfil the criterion for the Whitley Awards, this book fits the spirit most closely i.e. the promotion of Australasian fauna and its conservation. The title of this book is just that. *Amazing Facts about Australian…*is a series of some 16 publications by Steve Parish Publishing. At first glance, it may appear that the category this book best fits into is Commendation for the Young Naturalist, that most important group of young people who are set on a path of becoming naturalists or even career biologists. But the book has a wider appeal than that. To paraphrase a well-known expression, this book would be wasted on the young. It is a book for all concerned with the state of our environment. The text is superb; it is informative, up to the minute, eloquent and passionately written. Above all it is well researched. It is also beautifully produced with great images throughout from the iconic Bilby on the front cover. There are sections dealing with the questions; What is conservation? To How is it achieved? and indeed Why bother? The human impact is given appropriate space from pollution, feral introductions to climate change. Finally, there are sections dealing specifically with particular key environments.

Congratulations to the winning partnership of Karin Cox and Steve Parish Publishing.

Noel Tait (Macquarie University)

Zoological text

Forest Pattern and Ecological Process by David Lindenmayer: CSIRO Publishing, October 2009, ISBN 9780643096608, $120

David Lindenmayer has written a brilliant book. It not only deals with the title with the deftness of a researcher of international stature but also it is a personal account of his intellectual journey. The details of what Lindenmayer found out about the Victorian Montane Ash Forests, where he has worked since 1983, are essential reading for all forest ecologists, managers and also a group he did not name specifically, the policy writers.

Lindenmayer is a vertebrate ecologist, and his abiding passion is Leadbeater's Possum. He started with this rare animal; he then expanded the scope of his studies and the organisms that he worked with, but never lost sight of his possum. He may not be acutely aware of it, but in doing so, he has trodden a path that many of the world's leading zoologists have followed, sustaining a life-long affinity with a species, or group of like species.

The book is structured much like a lesson. You do have to be good at field work. Poor field skills will lead to unbalanced data sets, and any conclusions will simply collapse because of the lack of rigour and effort at collecting the data. After he has established how the forest works, he then considers the impacts of fire and logging, then mitigating the impacts and monitoring progress. From that perspective, it is a model of how to study a forest to be able to effectively manage it. In putting this book together, Lindenmayer has shown that it is possible to learn about a forest ecologically, as a zoologist, and therefore to manage the forest to aim for ecologically sustainable forest management. This is a rare achievement at an international level.

At the end of each chapter there is a most useful section called "Knowledge gaps". In the chapter on the distribution and abundance of individual species, he starts this section with the frank statement that the focus of this chapter, and much of the animal occurrence work in montane ash forests, has been on arboreal marsupials and, to a lesser extent, on small terrestrial mammals and birds. His next sentence is equally blunt - that other groups have received much less attention. Bats, for example, says Lindenmayer, have not been well studied, even though they are a species-rich group of mammals in montane ash forests. Other groups, says Lindenmayer, have received little attention from researchers. These include the invertebrates, which, Lindenmayer acknowledges,

comprise the vast majority of the biodiversity. Despite this bias in biodiversity, the book is a fabulous lesson in the progression of skills from a field worker to a thinker who can see unifying patterns, and then draw management lessons from them.

There is an engaging photograph on page 102. The caption reads: "Radio-tracking the Mountain Brushtail Possum at Camberville. (Photo by Esther Beaton)." The photo is of an intrepid forest zoologist wading through a creek or a flooded patch of forest holding an aerial on his mission to find the nest tree of the possum. What the caption does not say is that the zoologist is none other than the author. This is a rare moment of reticence in this otherwise bold book. No doubt a function of the photo was to demonstrate that all his rhetoric about how to manage a forest for its wildlife has been built on a solid foundation of fieldwork. No idle sitting about in this book.

The writing is straightforward, without flights of fancy or classical allusions, just plain English, sometimes in blunt language. Consider the following sentence from page 251: "However, the record of monitoring, both in Australia and globally, is atrocious." He has pulled no punches here, but there is also contrast in his style.

Among the amusing elements of the structure of his book are the sections headed "Lessons learnt" at the end of each chapter. Here the author puts his point of view, his lecture even, sometimes with a moral tone, for others to consider his conclusions. In the chapter on 'Mitigating logging impacts', he starts the second paragraph (p 243) of "Lessons learnt" with the sentence: "Perhaps the most sobering lesson from the work in the Central Highlands of Victoria is that the capacity to implement truly ecologically sustainable forest management is intimately intertwined with the level of commitment (or overcommitment) of forest resources to the timber industry." Lindenmayer is aware that the point may not be clear, so the next sentence reads: "That is, if sustained yields are too high, there is a risk of overcutting and limited capacity to accommodate the lower rates of production to meet the needs of other forest values." Those sentences are heavy reading given what he said so crisply about monitoring. Nonetheless, I agree with everything he says, but there is some circumlocution involved. Of course, he is stepping into the centre of the storm of the logging debate and saying that the forests are being logged too fast and too hard, and we shall lose the wildlife. Here the word commitment has a sting. He is asking for a commitment to ecologically sustainable management for forest wildlife, not just timber, and that it be monitored so that forest management practices can be adapted in the light of what is learnt. We are not there, nor is there even a real commitment to that principle, even though we now have the knowledge to do so. No wonder David Lindenmayer bites his tongue and selects his words over-carefully. His opening words "sobering lesson" might suggest that previous, even current, practices were made with the heady indifference of someone too inebriated to see the future of the forest, let alone how such a slow-growing wildlife resource as a large, hollow-bearing tree needs to be retained and treasured.

The book concludes with a crisp, personal and refreshing final chapter with some great ecological insights. The personal can be seen in such sentences (p 260) as: "Securing research funds is the bane of virtually all researchers' lives. Generating funds to maintain the work in the Victorian ash forests has been no exception. More than 85 grant proposals to over 25 different funding bodies have been submitted over the past 25 years. Most were unsuccessful." I doubt there is a researcher anywhere that does not smile at that statement. It ought to be a shock to all those who manage forests that even the very best of Australia's forest fauna ecologists has such a high failure rate of funding applications. Elsewhere in the book (p 193), Lindenmayer points out that the Victorian government receives about $11 million pa in revenue from the sale of sawlogs from the Central Highlands Mountain Ash, and about $4 million from the sale of residual logs. After processing, says Lindenmayer, the resource contributes about $485 million to the Victorian economy. One might ask why David Lindenmayer has such trouble securing funds for his research. I hasten to add that Lindenmayer is clear that he works as a team member, as is evident from the long list of co-authors, and from his acknowledgements. The use of 'he' here relates to the application for funds. One might surmise that spelling out the applications of his research to forest management generates some hostility, thereby choking off possible funding sources. However, those who do not apply what they find are not in the ascendancy in this debate. Lindenmayer is a leader because of his conviction that his research has a purpose. This book is part of that purpose, and we are the better for it, far better.

During his spirited opening speech at the International Ecological Conference in Brisbane in August 2009, the then federal environment minister Peter Garrett stated the view that conserving species was not really the way forward, given our limited funds, and that we need to take an ecosystem approach. There was a palpable groan from those in the audience sitting near me. Lindenmayer had written, in my view, the correct version of that dilemma on p 268 of *Forest Pattern and Ecological Processes, A Synthesis of 25 Years of Research*: "The kinds of studies completed in the montane ash forests emphasise the complementarity between species-oriented and ecosystem-oriented research approaches. As an example, an initial investigation, which commenced in 1983 and focused on the habitat requirements of a single species (Leadbeater's Possum), quickly evolved to include the habitat of other species and ecosystem-oriented investigations of disturbance regimes. Ecosystem-oriented studies focused on wildfire and logging, and how they affect stand structural complexity, landscape heterogeneity and the long-term dynamics of critical forest structures."

Lindenmayer has succeeded in his aim of weaving together the plethora of studies to generate new insights from the synthesis (p 268). David Lindenmayer richly deserves the Whitley Commendation for Zoological Text.

Dan Lunney (OEH NSW formerly DECCW NSW)

Periodical

Annual Journal of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs edited by David Elliott: ***Annual publication of Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History Issue 7,*** October 2009, ISSN 14484420, $19.95

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs publication is an annual periodical published by the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Corporation. These two traits alone, one would think, would make this publication an unlikely contender for a Whitley Award. The title implies a fairly narrow range of content and the magazine is not sold through many of the major retail outlets.

It is the job of the Whitley Committee to watch the progress of a range of regular publications. We have been watching the Age of Dinosaur since its first publication in 2003. During that time, the magazine has progressed from being a simple memento diary for the volunteers who participated in the dinosaur digs in western Queensland to a much more rounded and well-produced production. The changes in the magazine over time reflect the changing ambitions of the Age of Dinosaur project. Initially it was all about the retrieval of dinosaur bones from a dusty paddock, whereas now, it is fast becoming a more general natural history journal. In the early years, the stories were written by the volunteers and group leaders and focused on the events of that year. In the later years, the stories, while still having a palaeontological flavour, have expanded beyond dinosaurs and dinosaur diggers. The latest issue includes feature articles on new dinosaur discoveries, ancient birds, stromatolites, meteorites and geology. If it continues to widen its range of topics, Age of Dinosaur may eventually fill the void left by the demise of Nature Australia as Australia's premier natural history publication.

In 2009, Age of Dinosaur magazine took out its first Whitley Award. That award was given because of the marked improvements in layout, design and article quality that appeared in issue number 6. It is a feature of issue 7, that the articles within it are written by the relevant experts in each field, and that the articles have been edited and supported with increasingly more sophisticated images, inserts and composite diagrams and photos.

I applaud David Elliott and his team for the production and promotion of the Age of Dinosaurs magazine and the dinosaur project. It is a great credit to the organisers and volunteers that a magazine that started from such a humble beginning has risen so far and clearly has the potential to go even further. I look forward to following the evolution of this journal and the Age of Dinosaur's project.

Arthur White (Environmental Consultant)

Pocket Guide

A Wild Australia Guide: Bats by Les Hall: Steve Parish Publishing, November 2009, ISBN 9781741935141, $14.95

This is a first rate book on bats for Australians. It is small (A5 size), 96 pages, and fits in a glove box or backpack. As we now expect from Steve Parish's books and calendars, the photos are great. Most are by Steve Parish, but there are other photographic contributors, which means that the reach of the book will be enhanced by the contributions of the various bat specialists, or bat photographic specialists. Les Hall's text is straightforward, clear and informative, both for the field and at home. The book does not have a key to bat species, but it does describe each genus. It assists in distinguishing one species from another, but it is not sufficient in itself. Of the 96 pages, 18 are devoted to a valuable range of subjects from conservation to the care of individual bats. The book's aims are given on the fly leaf – an introduction to the fascinating world of bats. It succeeds admirably.

Les Hall is one of my heroes. He is generous with his knowledge, his time and his ideas. In 1980, I attended the first ever National Bat Conference, organised by Dedee Woodside and Les' long-term colleague Greg Richards. I saw an opportunity to add bats to the animals that I was studying in a major project to determine the impact of woodchipping on the fauna in south-eastern NSW. Who did I turn to, but Dedee, Greg and Les. Their generosity made the work possible, and in turn we were able to contribute to bat biology and conservation in Australia. I had asked Les a series of questions, but we reached a point where Les said he did not know the answers, and neither did anyone else, and that it was my task to find out. Les was most interested in our findings.

What was particularly interesting was the use being made of the little 1979 booklet *A Field Guide to the Bats of South-east Australia*, from the Queensland Museum, by Les Hall and Greg Richards. My most vivid memory was watching a group of zoologists sitting around the campfire making notes in the margins of their own copy of this booklet. Budding bat biologist Sue Churchill - now famous for her book *Australian Bats* (now in its 2nd edition) - was among them. Les Hall has continued that leadership with *A Wild Australia Guide. Bats*. It is not definitive, it was not meant to be, but it does greatly broaden the range of people who will now appreciate bats.

In 1990, as the relatively new editor of *Australian Zoologist*, I decided to run a series of three papers. One was on bats, the other two were on national parks and state of the nation. Les Hall accepted my invitation to write the piece on bats. I then circulated each of the three papers to relevant experts, and published their responses. Les' paper provoked a fascinating range of responses, and they stand as a record of the state of play of bat biology at the time. The real point here though is

to demonstrate that Les Hall has long enjoyed the stature of one of Australia's pioneers in the bat world, with his enthusiasm, skill and generosity of time and knowledge. By encouraging others, Les has become one of the most respected figures in the Australasian bat world and, of course, that has been recognised internationally.

A *Wild Australia Guide. Bats* is richly deserving of this Whitley award.

Dan Lunney (OEH NSW formerly DECCW NSW)

Natural History

Fishes of the Open Ocean: a Natural History and Illustrated Guide by Julian Pepperell illustrated by Guy Harvey: University of NSW Press, November 2009, ISBN 9780868407005, $59.95

This book is great. It covers the fishes that live in 330 million cubic miles of open ocean – the largest aquatic habitat on Earth. It's about the fastest, highest jumping and most migratory fishes on the planet. We are talking about the slow plankton straining whale sharks up to streamlined predators like the white shark. Of course it also includes the tunas, marlins and a host of other fishes. It covers less well-known fishes such as flying fishes, lancet fishes, sunfish and louvar.

The author, Dr Julian Pepperell, is a well-known marine biologist. He has authored many books and scientific papers and is a world authority on billfishes, tunas and sharks. He has conducted research on these for over 30 years. After working with NSW Fisheries, where I first met Julian, he established his own research company in 1991. He now conducts research in partnership with universities and government agencies. He is past president of the ASFB.

When Noel asked me to take a look at the book he suggested a number of categories to think about as I read it. The book is about the pelagic species of the open ocean so it is much wider in geographic coverage than just Australasia. Having said that as an Australian reader, I felt that it was highly relevant to our region. The book fills a slot not occupied by another publication. The book has an appeal to a wide range of readers, from professional ichthyologists to fishermen. For each species the author provides information on a range of issues concerning conservation biology. The book is excellently presented. It would sit comfortably on the bookshelf of an ichthyologist or the coffee table of an angler. Although factual and accurate it is highly readable. The author has pulled together facts from many areas. His extensive fisheries and ichthyological experience shows through the book. For me the only slight down side is the bibliography is not extensive. The author states however that he did not want to cite every paper used in the production of the book. Actually I can understand this. The book is not a research paper so he can get away with it. I am delighted to be able to present the author Dr Julian Pepperell with the Whitley Certificate of Commendation for Natural History.

Mark Mc Grouther Australian Museum

Zoological Resource

Pathology of Australian native wildlife by Philip Ladds: CSIRO Publishing, May 2009, ISBN 9780643094444, $195

It is a great pleasure and honour to present this Whitley Award to Dr Philip Ladds for his resource text *Pathology of Australian Native Wildlife*"published by CSIRO.

Drawing from his experience as Professor of Veterinary Pathology, officer in charge of a state veterinary diagnostic laboratory and government and community veterinarian, Philip realised the need to have a high quality text-book to improve our understanding of wildlife health and disease. The *Pathology of Australian Native Wildlife* is now a landmark text - a critical reference to help us care for wildlife, to investigate disease outbreaks, to understand the ecology of disease causing agents and to measure the impacts of disease on our native wildlife.

Historically, the health issues of wildlife and invasive species in Australia has been confounded by gaps in our knowledge, funding shortfalls and agency responsibility, yet there are now many factors driving increased interest in wildlife health, particularly as it relates to biosecurity.

Globally, ecosystems are changing at an unprecedented rate, with 60 per cent now considered degraded (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment). Climate change is just one factor driving ecosystem change and disease emergence. Additional factors that are driving an interest in wildlife health include: public concern for animal welfare, zoonotic diseases, biodiversity conservation and bioterrorism detection.

In a global environment where most of the emerging diseases over the past 10 years have originated from wildlife, there has never been more interest in wildlife health. Not surprisingly, financial considerations are the most compelling factors that have driven this interest. Overall, it is estimated that disease emergence from wildlife has cost the global economy over $100 billion since the mid-1990's. Global risk assessments highlight the emergence of disease from wildlife as the most significant and growing threat to global biosecurity.

In Australia, the emergence of disease from native fauna over the past two decades has been fascinating. We have seen the discovery of three zoonotic viruses from bats over a three-year period, the chytrid fungus (a soil-borne organism that had not previously caused disease in a vertebrate) suddenly became implicated in the extinction of numerous amphibian species and the emergence of the Tasmanian Devil Facial Tumour Disease. This

facial tumour disease has an intriguing mechanism of transmission that holds invaluable lessons for domestic animal and human health.

The Pathology of Australian Native Wildlife will serve as a resource to help maximise the efficiency of disease diagnosis and our ability to detect new syndromes, lure, train and retain scientists in the wildlife health and diagnostic sciences and protect our collective knowledge of wildlife health into the future.

These outcomes contribute to maintaining Australia's favourable trade status and to protecting our own health, our ecosystems and our biodiversity.

In his text, Philip has drawn together a wealth of accurate information and high quality images into 45 chapters organised by host and disease-causing agent. The text incorporates peer-reviewed literature and the collective knowledge retrieved from case reports, file cabinets and experience.

The Pathology of Australian Native Wildlife is fact-based, succinct, and supported with photographs sufficient to allow the reader to feel comfortable within this visual field of science. The text incorporates clinical findings and diagnostic pathways to support the efforts of clinical veterinarians, zoo veterinarians, laboratory diagnosticians, educators, researchers, ecologists and wildlife managers.

To bring these materials together nationally in one clear, concise and coherent reference text has been a challenge – a massive task – gargantuan. Yet Philip has met that challenge with his usual calm, gentlemanly, graceful and intelligent manor. Jenny Ladds must also be acknowledged for her longstanding contribution to this endeavour. *The Pathology of Australian Native Wildlife* is evidence of Philip's career-long commitment to the advancement of veterinary pathology, wildlife health and teaching. This is an incredible scientific achievement by an incredible man.

Karrie Rose (Taronga Conservation Society, Australia)

Special Commendation

A significant feature of this year's Award Ceremony was the presentation of a **Special Commendation to Steve Parish**. In 2003, the Royal Zoological Society NSW instigated this very prestigious award to acknowledge outstanding contributions to the promotion of Australasian fauna and its conservation through publishing. Although the awarding is long overdue, it is very timely in one sense as it coincides with the 50th anniversary of Steve's launch into the world of nature photography. While Steve could not be present at the ceremony, Karen Cox who has supplied the text to accompany many of Steve Parish publications accepted the Certificate on his behalf.

In presenting the Special Commendation, Dr Hal Cogger made the following comments on Steve's contribution to the promotion of Australia's fauna.

Steve Parish is one of Australia's great publishing entrepreneurs – a larger than life character whose books and specialized educational publications, in terms of their general audience and market penetration, have dominated environmental and natural history publication in Australia for several decades.

I first got to know of Steve as an underwater explorer and later for his landscape and wildlife photographs when he was on the staff of the Qld NPWS in the '70s. He'd had an earlier career as a Navy diver in the '60s and soon became an outstanding photojournalist.

But it wasn't till the mid-'80s that Steve set up his own publishing house and started to produce an enormous range of books written and illustrated by himself, and soon by a stable of outstanding naturalist writers, photographers and educators who produced publications for people of all ages – from pre-schoolers to grey nomads.

Steve, like all successful entrepreneurs, was not without his occasional detractors, especially those who thought his books were TOO popular and therefore questionable. These were days.

For more information contact

Dr Noel Tait, Chairman, Whitley Awards Committee,
RZS NSW
phone/fax: 612 9427 6747;
mobile: 0419 4119 67;
email: noelrobyn@bigpond.com