

BOOK REVIEW

by MARCEL VAN DEN BROEK

Bourke, G., and Nunn, R. 2012. Australian Carnivorous Plants. Hardcover, 180 pp., 180 images, ISBN: 978-1-908787-02-6. Redfern Natural History Productions. £29.99/£34.99 (signed/unsigned) + shipping from redfernnaturalhistory.com.

In front of me is the latest publication from Redfern, this time not from the hand of Stewart McPherson but “Made in Australia” by natives.

Greg Bourke and Richard Nunn are two carnivorous plant enthusiasts with a well-deserved reputation in fieldwork and photography. They combined their knowledge and passion to produce a book about the carnivorous plants of their native land.

Let me start by stating what this book isn't: It is not the long awaited and desperately needed field guide to the carnivorous plants of Down Under. But if not that, then what is it and why should you buy it?

It's somewhat ungainly size (31.5 cm wide and 24 cm high) proclaims exactly what it is: A coffee table book and a superb one at that.

Not much for detailed text I'm afraid, but a wealth of high quality photographs from all over this island continent adorn this book.

All families of carnivorous plant are mentioned in this work, as indeed are a very large number of actual species. The writers claim to have given the first complete listing of all currently known species of Australian carnivorous plants. With the continuous discovery of new plants and the reclassification of botanical status based on our advancing knowledge it is highly likely that when you read this book several change will already need to be made, but everyone will have to agree that this is the most complete work on the subject to date and is impressive by any standard.

Each section starts with a short text giving the highlights of the botanical history of the family, some information on the structure of the plant, its trapping mechanism, the distribution, and its habitat.

A nice touch is the short texts labeled “Photographic Challenge”, giving an insight into the problems of photographing the plants.

While I frankly would have liked more information on growing conditions, this is a very good book. The highly detailed pictures of each species are a feast for the eye and the stunning shots of the Australian landscape make you want to run to the airport and fly over.

The book ends with a section on the conservation status of carnivorous plants in Australia naming not only the usual suspects as human influence as a main source, but also the lack of human influence. Many species have evolved not only with but also because of 40,000 years of fire stick farming and now modern Australian society is very much focused on the prevention of fires to protect property and people. Also global changes in the weather is predicted to see the demise of several species, for example, *Drosera arcturi* is only found on the highest and coldest peaks and those places are getting scarce.

All in all this is a great book to dream away with and at £29.99, a very reasonably priced book at that.