

# Book reviews

**Women in Wildlife Science: Building Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** edited by Carol L. Chambers and Kerry L. Nicholson (2022) 400 pp., Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA. ISBN 978-1-4214-4502-1 (hbk), USD 49.95.

The importance of biodiversity in maintaining functional living systems is a fundamental principle in ecology and conservation. As scientists, we recognize that a diverse ecosystem—filled with interacting elements occupying different niches, performing various ecological functions, and arising from distinct evolutionary legacies—contributes to resilience, reorganization and renewal. ‘Each mammal, bird, plant, fungus, insect, amphibian, reptile, and soil microbe’, as the authors of this book say, ‘has a unique part to play’ (p. 4).

Although we work tirelessly to promote diversity in nature, we often fail to value and cultivate the same diversity in our professional environment. *Women in Wildlife Science: Building Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion* opens by highlighting the well-established fact that diverse communities, whether ecological or otherwise, are strong, productive and resilient. Research shows that groups with gender, cognitive and cultural diversity excel in problem-solving, creativity and impact. Yet even today, the wildlife profession remains largely homogenous: a field dominated by Western, white, middle-class men, which fails to reflect the diverse community it serves, and which can stagnate from drawing too heavily on a single culture, history and perspective. Despite the passion and prevalence of women and people from marginalized communities entering wildlife science, we are often faced with an unwelcoming, unhealthy and unsafe environment that quickly weeds out those that do not fit the mould.

The authors of this collection represent a wonderfully diverse—yet systemically under-represented and oppressed—segment of wildlife science. They come from various cultural, economic and racial backgrounds and bring with them a wide variety of lived experiences. Throughout the book, they shed light on the unique barriers faced by marginalized communities within the profession, contextualizing these challenges within broader histories of oppression, conflict, colonialism, racism, ableism, gender discrimination and ageism. They demonstrate how barriers to progression manifest at all career stages and within different institutional settings, ranging from subtle biases and microaggressions to overt discrimination. The intersectional nature of these challenges can compound the difficulties

faced by individuals, leading to what is often referred to as a leaky pipeline, whereby many women enter the field but few attain leadership positions or platforms of significant visibility.

However, the book goes beyond merely showcasing these struggles: it offers actionable strategies to bring about systemic change within the wildlife profession. Each chapter highlights the role of community and support, of visibility and mentorship, of sponsors, advocates and allies. By providing specific guidance and exercises, *Women in Wildlife Science* encourages readers to examine their own biases and rethink their interactions with colleagues, recruitment practices and organizational structures, aiming not just for equality but for equity.

As a woman in the wildlife space, and more specifically one with a particular focus on uplifting and empowering other women in the field, I found this book to be an invaluable resource. The lived experiences of the authors, buttressed by research and statistics, were in equal parts uplifting and hard to digest. I felt pangs as I saw actions of my own supervisors, advisors and colleagues reflected in the stories told by others; I felt connected with this community and grateful for these other women’s honesty and vulnerability—I felt that I was not alone. However, I acknowledge my own privileges as a middle-class, white, able-bodied and childless woman who has neither suffered historical traumas nor faced the same aggressions or physical challenges that others endure. This book serves as an important reminder of the responsibility we have as individuals with privilege to educate ourselves and use our power and position to actively create safe and inclusive environments.

Creating such environments requires conscious, collective effort and understanding, time and energy, and a willingness to go beyond box-ticking exercises in diversity/inclusion efforts that fail to address the underlying biases. *Women in Wildlife Science* offers an excellent starting point—for individuals and organizations alike—from which to begin examining our relationships with marginalized female communities and working together to rebuild our somewhat degraded professional ecosystem to one where we can all flourish, thrive and work together for a better future for nature.

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**Coral Reefs of Australia: Perspectives from Beyond the Water’s Edge** edited by Sarah Hamylton, Pat Hutchings & Ove Hoegh-Guldberg (2022) 344 pp., CSIRO Publishing, Clayton, Australia. ISBN 978-1-4863-1548-2 (pbk), AUD 99.99.

Part encyclopedia, part coffee table book, part testimonial—this ambitious volume on the reefs of Australia surprises and delights. The volume makes it immediately obvious that Australia’s marine heritage goes far beyond its fabled Great Barrier Reef, with a variety of morphologically and ecologically different reef systems found off virtually all the continent’s coasts. Essay-like contributions are accompanied by stunning and sometimes unusual images, such as the decline-in-action photographs overlaying a large bleached coral head with one subsequently colonized by algae (pp. 272–273), the dramatic aerial photograph of contained coral spawn developing into larvae (pp. 292–293), or the graphic showing the connectivity between estuaries and offshore reefs (p. 162).

This is not a compendium on coral species in the style of J.E.N. Veron’s landmark 1993 work *Corals of Australia and the IndoPacific*, and neither is it a coherent story of reef life akin to Charles Birkland’s eloquent book *Life and Death of Coral Reefs*, from 1997. Instead, it is a combination of science and storytelling, presenting a variety of perspectives in diverse styles of writing.

The volume begins with brief but illuminating geomorphological and biological descriptions of the many varied reef systems around Australia’s coasts and further afield in places such as Cocos and Christmas Islands. Starting with Western Australia rather than the Great Barrier Reef is unexpected and refreshing.

In a few places, the contributors appear to assume background knowledge that readers may not necessarily possess; for example, mass coral bleaching is first mentioned on page 8 but not explained until page 146. Similarly, the map on page 29, and a few others, make it difficult to locate specific reef systems described in the text, perhaps because the authors assume readers are already familiar with the geography of these marine systems. But these are minor shortcomings that do not detract from the book’s broader value.

The oral histories of Indigenous Peoples, reaching back 60,000 years or more, provide an important perspective on the corals of Australia, and much of the book brings this view into focus for those accustomed to a