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Book Review


The intrinsic biodiversity values of Australia's remaining temperate woodlands have resulted in an increasing research effort to better understand these environments and to guide and inform conservation management and policy. ‘*Temperate Woodland Conservation and Management*’ can be viewed as an update of Hobbs and Yates (2000) and it provides an overview of research and management insights acquired over the last decade. *Temperate Woodland Conservation and Management* is essentially a compilation of opinion pieces from experts at the forefront of temperate woodland ecology, management and policy-making.

The first chapter gives a brief overview of the book's scope. It is set up to make the latest research and thinking on conservation and management of temperate woodlands readily available and accessible to the ‘wide audience’ involved in these environments. Lacking a clear objective, the book is aiming to be a thought-provoking read, leaving the reader to decide for themselves what information and who's opinions are useful or not. The reader is provided with a minimum amount of information about the content of the following chapters, presumably to leave the reader unbiased in exploring the book further.

Each chapter is structured in a similar format, starting with a list of ‘key lessons’, a location map to give the spatial context of the reported work, a few paragraphs elaborating on each ‘lesson’ and a brief conclusion. The chapters finish with the authors’ bios (and references), which seem to be there as an additional tool for the reader to determine the worth and credibility of the statements made in the preceding text. Altogether, this is a very workable format and provides the reader with the options to quickly look for relevant areas of interest and get a quick overview of the main topics and points raised by each author. However, with the intended audience in mind, I found that adding colour and more figures/pictures in support of the text would have improved the readability of the individual chapters considerably.

Good specific examples are provided of the current knowledge for what is best in terms of conservation and management of the temperate wooded landscapes in Australia. Most ‘best practice’ guidelines given, however, are primarily backed up by research evidence on fauna. In terms of evidence based on research focusing on particular plant and/or tree species, and studies on the effectiveness and the range of management tools available (e.g. for restoration), there are only few specific examples mentioned. This is interesting, where, for instance, most woodland fauna are reliant on a specific vegetation component, yet it seems that no particular research programme focuses on the vegetation alone. It seems important to me that obtaining a full understanding of how the vegetation functions and interacts comes first in guiding successful management and conservation practice. Various authors equally recognize this caveat in knowledge by highlighting that more work needs to be carried out on understanding how fauna interacts with woodland vegetation. Clearly, these gaps in knowledge need to be filled in the future, as well as the apparent lack of work conducted in the southwest of Australia.

The editors provide an excellent summary in the final part of this book structured around the key themes emerging from the individual preceding chapters. This chapter has the title: ‘How far have we come? Perspectives on Ecology, Management and Conservation of Australia’s Temperate
Woodlands’. From this chapter, you get a good flavour of the overall content and topics of the book, although the editors do not directly answer the title’s question. Again, they leave this up to the reader to decide. I would personally recommend the reader to read this final chapter first to get a good overview of the books content, before targeting the preceding chapters.

The key messages that emerged from this book for me were the (everlasting) call for more woodland cover and the need to adopt a more landscape-scale approach to management and conservation. Because so little is left, the main priorities for management and conservation of temperate woodland seem to be (from high to low): (i) to keep and maintain what is still left, (ii) to restore degraded woodland and wherever possible (iii) to create new woodland.

This book is a good read, and the zeal of some of the authors is sometimes even entertaining, but it generally left me with a feeling of often creating more questions than providing answers. However, following the editors’ aim of this book, I will leave it up to you to decide!

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