

BOOK REVIEW

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE FUNGI OF AUSTRALIA, Young, A.M., Smith, K. (2005). University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, Australia. xvi + 240 pp. Price AUS\$29.95

Tony Young's 1982 *Common Australian Fungi* has lived on the shelf with my most used ID books since I bought it in the late 1980s. It and its later editions have provided me with a useful link between the more common picture books and the technical literature by providing enough microscopic detail to encourage me to seek out the technical literature to confirm my suspicions. So it was with some excitement that I received his new book for review.

This is a substantial little book of 240 pages dealing 168 species (I did count them). It was with some disappointment that the little sketches of spores and basidia are gone but these are more than made up for by the line drawings and water colours of Kay Smith and Tony's colour photography. According to the publisher blurb there are 260 illustrations in all with 23 watercolours and 36 photographs. Kay's water colour, pen and wash, and line drawings are very well executed and far exceed in quality the illustrations in Tony's earlier book. Similarly Tony's photos are clear and well represent the species depicted.

The book is divided into ten sections. The first section gives a brief introduction of fungal biology, reproduction, major groups of macrofungi, as well as how to collect, describe and preserve voucher specimens. The next section called 'Some Fungal Facts' explains fairy rings, bioluminescence, mycorrhizas, vegetable caterpillars, and mycophagy by insects, reptiles and marsupials. This is followed by a section on the dangers of collecting mushrooms for the table in this part of the world where there is no history of eating most of our native species. As I often tell people, who will insist on eating the unknown, to please leave a sample of the consumed fungus in the fridge with a note saying 'This is the one that I've eaten' so that we at least gain knowledge from their tragic death.

The section on classification and on scientific names is a good, simple introduction to the use and utility of Latin binomials. Unfortunately the old story of the superiority of the binomial, due to supposed stability and internationalism, over the provincialism of common names gets an airing once again. Although synonyms are briefly mentioned it

would be nice to admit that a species may have several competing binomials in use simultaneously as experts argue their validity. Or even that a tried and trusted binomial can suddenly disappear as a result of taxonomic revision. Yes, the binomial has utility but it is also a minefield of uncertainty and confusion to the beginner.

Pictorial keys help the reader to quickly decide whether or not their find is a slime mould, jelly, polyporoid, leathery, coral, toothed, wrinkled, gilled, bolete, phalloid, gastroid, bird's-nest, or ascomycete fungus. By far the most fungi dealt with are the gilled fungi and this section of the key is further divided by habitat – on wood, soil, grasslands, animal remains and dung. The last and largest section of the book is the species descriptions and these are laid out in the same sequence as the key although the slime moulds are at the end rather than the beginning. Each species has a Latin binomial, comments on common names, description of fruit bodies, spores, habit and additional notes, distribution, and a line drawing. As already mentioned some are further supplemented by photographs and water colour illustrations.

Finally a recommendation, I would certainly encourage Australian mycologist to purchase this useful little book. As a New Zealand mycologist I consider the book to be useful as 96 of the 168 illustrated species are also present in New Zealand. Some of the Latin binomials will appear strange to New Zealand users, such as *Clathrus archeri* rather than *Anthurus archeri*, but these can be quickly checked in the NZFungi database (nzfungi.landcareresearch.co.nz) and altered to the names accepted here. All in all a nice little book worth buying.

Geoff Ridley