

Cronin's Key Guide: Australian Reptiles and Frogs

by Leonard Cronin

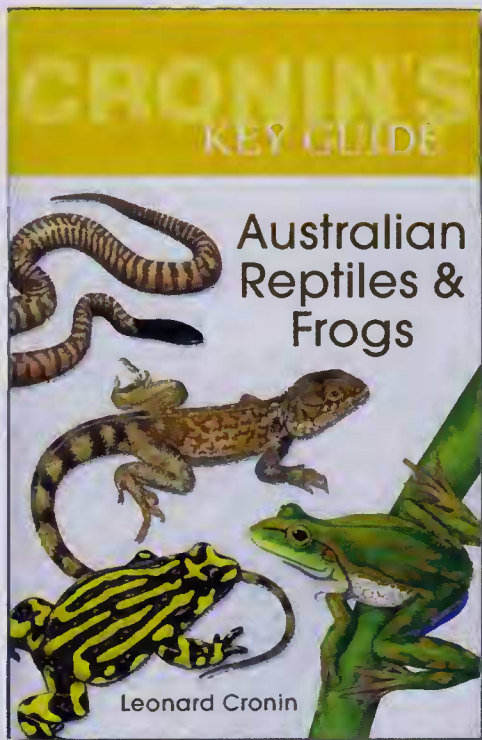
Publisher: *Allen & Unwin*, 2009. 232 pages, paperback.
ISBN 9781741751123. RRP \$35.00.

Herpetologists have long envied their ornithologist cousins for their comparative wealth of choice with regard to field guides. While the binocular-clad birdo struggles to choose between Simpson and Day, Pizzey and Knight, or Slater (and perhaps which khaki vest best compliments khaki cargo-pants), the herpetologist cuts a somber figure as he/she relentlessly tries to shove the latest version of Cogger into their backpack, squashing lunch in the process. Fortunately, this dichotomy of riches has eased somewhat in recent years, with the release of Wilson and Swan (2003) and a number of state and region-centric guides to reptiles and amphibians (Swan *et al.* 2004; Swan and Wathero 2005; Wilson 2005). One of the most recent contributions is *Cronin's Key Guide: Australian Reptiles and Frogs*.

This book is one in a series of field guides written by naturalist Leonard Cronin, covering Australian mammals, trees, wildflowers and rainforest plants. These guides are intended for a general audience, and as such do not constitute an exhaustive inventory of Australian fauna and flora, but rather focus on commonly encountered or particularly interesting species. A brief introduction includes general information about the herpetofauna of Australia, instructions on how to identify snakes and, importantly, information on how to apply first-aid to a snake bite. A very helpful illustrated index of species, complete with maps of geographic ranges, can be found on pages 11-25. This will be a particularly useful addition to amateur naturalists who can flick through illustrations of up to 15 species per-page, rather than thumbing through the entire guide trying to find that mystery skink or frog.

Although omitting species from a field guide is an obvious shortcoming, it allows Cronin to incorporate additional information on the approximately 200 species he does include. Rather than having multiple species per page as

in other guides (e.g. Wilson and Swan 2003), an entire page is dedicated to each species. The result is a generous amount of information detailing descriptions of the behaviour, physical appearance, development, diet and habitat of each species, all written in a simple and accessible manner. The section on behaviour will be of particular interest to many, as Cronin documents some of the more peculiar habits of our native herpetofauna, such as the devotedly monogamous lifestyle of the Shingleback Lizard *Tiliqua rugosa* or the way a Northern Death Adder *Acanthophis praelongus* lures its prey by wiggling its tail to mimic a worm or caterpillar.



This field-guide does have some shortcomings. First, because it is intended for a general audience, professional herpetologists may find it to have limited appeal. The plates are not of the standard of many bird and mammal guides (e.g. Menkhorst and Knight 2004), and the physical descriptions would help little if, for example, attempting to distinguish between closely related species of *Ctenotus*. I found the choice of species in the guide was generally in accordance with the aim of including those 'likely to be noticed in their habitats', with a couple of exceptions. For instance, the most commonly encountered species in the rich herpetofaunal assemblages of the Murray mallee region is the Mallee Dragon *Ctenophorus fordii*, but this species is not included in the guide.

Overall, I believe Cronin has made a solid contribution to the body of field guides of Australian reptiles and amphibians. This guide provides a good introduction to the herpetofauna

of Australia, particularly for individuals with an amateur interest in reptiles and amphibians. Additionally, the generous text on the species included constitutes a useful review of their ecology, and perhaps a good read for that eccentric breed of herpetologist who regards field guides as suitable (or ideal) bed-time reading.

References

- Menkhorst P and Knight F (2004) *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia*. (Oxford University Press: South Melbourne)
 Swan G, Shea G and Sadlier R (2004) *A Field Guide to Reptiles of New South Wales*. (Reed New Holland: Sydney)
 Swan M and Watharow S (2005) *Snakes, Lizards and Frogs of the Victorian Mallee*. (CSIRO Publishing: Collingwood)
 Wilson S (2005) *A Field Guide to Reptiles of Queensland*. (New Holland: Sydney)
 Wilson S and Swan G (2003) *A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia*. (Reed New Holland: Sydney)

Dale G Nimmo

Landscape Ecology Research Group
 School of Life and Environmental Studies
 Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3125

One hundred and one years ago

EXCURSION TO BEVERIDGE

BY F.G.A. Barnard

This excursion took place on Saturday, 13th March, and was arranged for the purpose of visiting the extinct crater marked on maps of Victoria as Mount Bland, but locally known as Mount Fraser, after some previous owner of the property. Though the afternoon threatened to be showery, and the locality is generally considered an uninteresting one, the leader was pleased to have a following of 17 members and friends, including several ladies. Mt. Bland, or Beveridge Hill, as it is also known, can be easily seen on the northern horizon from the more elevated parts of Melbourne, such as the higher parts of Carlton, and from there lies a little to the west of due north. Beveridge station is 989 feet above sea-level, and as the mount is little more than half a mile from the station, the gradual slope towards the summit commences almost at once. The outlook here was extremely interesting. Fifty feet below was the floor of the crater, a perfectly level, little plain, about 180 yards in diameter, while all round, in almost a perfect circle rose the encircling rim, except towards the north west, where it was broken down, and had formed the site for the lava of former ages. On the southern side of the breach the rim rose to 1,280 feet, while on the opposite side (the northern side of the crater), it rose to its highest point, 1,380 feet above sea-level; round to the east it gradually fell to the spot from which we first viewed it. The breach itself is about 20 feet above the level of the floor. In one corner of the bottom is a waterhole for stock, excavated in the solid lava (bluestone), but, owing to the dry season, it contained little water. It is probable that in this isolated pond some interesting life might be found after a wet season. From the highest part of the rim an excellent view of the surrounding country was obtained. Though very hazy and stormy towards the south, we were able to pick out the You Yangs, 50 miles away; the Anakies, a little further; Macedon, Hanging Rock (the scene of the excursion three weeks before), 20 miles to the north-west. Due north was the Big Hill, or Pretty Sally's Hill, an outlier of the Dividing Range, with Wallan at its foot, while to the east were the Plenty Ranges, almost enshrouded in heavy masses of black clouds. Besides these more prominent mountains, numerous points of eruption occur all round, such as the Bald Hill, a little further south, Green Hill, close to Wallan, &c, details of which will be found in a paper by Mr. T. S. Hart, M.A., read before this Club some years ago (*Vict. Nat.*, xi., 74). Having taken in the surroundings sufficiently, we traversed the rim towards the west, to where, owing to the operations of rabbits, there was an exposure of tuffs and lapilli, of which nice specimens were secured.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* XXVI pp. 4-6 May 1909