

HOW FAR HAVE WE COME? PERSPECTIVES ON ECOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIA'S TEMPERATE WOODLANDS

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Introduction

Australia's temperate woodlands are environments deeply embedded in the nation's history, heritage and culture. They were occupied by indigenous people for tens of thousands of years and are culturally important for Australians of European descent. They are the places where gold was first discovered, were home to some of the nation's most notorious bushrangers, provided the backdrop for classic paintings by masters like Tom Roberts and were the inspiration for iconic story-tellers such as Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson. Temperate woodlands are also critically important repositories of Australian and global biodiversity. There are, therefore, compelling historical, cultural and ecological reasons for the informed management and conservation of these environments. These compelling reasons, however, are mismatched with the reality of the environmental status of the nation's temperate woodland environments.

For the most part, Australia's temperate woodlands are heavily cleared, much of the remaining vegetation is in poor condition, and large numbers of the plants and animals found in these environments are threatened or endangered. This situation, coupled with the fact that the vast majority of remaining temperate woodland is on private land that has primary management objectives other than conservation, means that the management of temperate woodlands is characterised by a raft of ecological, social and economic challenges. Many of the challenges appear prominently in the chapters in this book. In this final chapter, we provide a brief overview of some of these challenges through discussing what we consider to be 10 emergent themes and issues arising from the work presented by the various authors. We give a short commentary on each of these issues. The first seven themes are largely ecological ones: they are followed by two topics that are either cross-disciplinary or have direct socio-ecological or direct science policy implications. The tenth and final theme explores some future perspectives in woodland conservation and management. In keeping with the general spirit of this book, we have kept this chapter short; it is far from an exhaustive treatise of all issues nor a detailed exploration of any single issue in great depth.