

# Reviews

## Book

by John Steel

**Buck, W.R.; Vitt, D.H.; Malcolm, W.M. 2002.** *Key to the genera of Australian mosses.* 120 pp. Spiral bound. Australian Biological Resources Study, Canberra. \$NZ45.

New Zealand has 207 genera of mosses which makes it relatively rich when compared to Australia which has 291, 170 of which are shared. Knowing this, I decided to risk what appears a rather high price for a small book which may have had limited value. As soon as I saw the cover I knew I was onto a winner!

I am a huge fan of Bill Malcolm's work and the front cover has his mark stamped all over it. Essentially it is a companion volume to the Malcolms' glossary (Malcolm, W.M.; Malcolm, N. 2000) and the two work together rather well. This volume is packed with information but could prove troublesome to the novice with little knowledge of the terminology.

The key is typically dichotomous but each terminal branch comprises a full description of a genus. The description is concise, full and even covers habitat and distribution within Australia. Each page has either four or eight excellent colour photographs highlighting some feature of the genus described and these have an added advantage of breaking up the rather densely packed layout. The photographs are small but effective with the exception of a few of those displaying a plant habit. The captions generally contain only a species' name and here the beginner needs access to the glossary to backtrack using the name to find a picture to identify the feature – I still cannot work out the cellular feature for what appears to be a leaf cross-section from *Atrichum angustatum*. (For my nit-picky point - a leaf of *Atrichum angustifolium* is shown but appears in the glossary as *A. angustatum*.) This could also prove difficult for the Australian species which do not feature in the glossary. No doubt caption additions would have added considerably to space and cost.

A valuable addition to the New Zealand library; not a millimetre of space goes unused nor an unnecessary word added and yet the book does not suffer from cramping. And if the photographs are not enough the book ends with four pages of superb coloured line-drawings.

**Reference:** Malcolm, W.M.; Malcolm, N. (2000) *Mosses and other bryophytes. An illustrated glossary.* Micro-Optics Press, Nelson.

Fig. *Tayloria octoblepharis* leaf, cleared. From book reviewed above.

