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The Housing Bomb, Why our addiction to houses is destroying the environment and threatening our society.

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and even smaller but “lovable” fauna such as frogs attract the interest of the greater population much more than easily overlooked invertebrates. Promoting greater awareness of such species is a useful flow-on effect from the publication of this book.

The section on vertebrates includes cartilaginous fishes, bony fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. Good detailed information is given for most species, but not beyond what could be found in the many field guides, and other larger works, on Australian vertebrates. I cannot comment on the information provided for cartilaginous and bony fishes, as they are outside my area of knowledge, however as with the whole book, this section was informative and well written.

I found the frogs section the most useful part of this book, partly because of the lack of a definitive guide to frogs of either Australia or Queensland. It is unfortunate that there are so many species that need to be covered. The information is detailed and current, written by recognized experts on each species, and indeed highlights the precarious position of many of our amphibian fauna.

Birds, mammals are adequately covered in terms of descriptions, distributions and conservation information. The book claims to contain up to date distribution data, photos and maps for most of Queensland’s threatened animals, yet it seems surprising that some species do not have photos. An example of this is Sharman’s Rock Wallaby. A property owned by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy contains 80% of the known range of this species, the group regularly uses camera traps to monitor the population, yet no photograph of the species is included.

One area in which readers may have issues is in the reptile sections – currently Australian reptile taxonomy is undergoing rapid revision and description of new species; taxonomy quickly becomes out-of-date. A regularly updated online reference associated with the book would mitigate this problem, but until then readers may be confused if not familiar with the species themselves.

The book has a large, attractive format, glossy illustrations and easy to read text. It would have benefited from perhaps colour coding the page tabs in taxonomic groups for easy location but this is a minor detraction from the overall package. Due to its size and weight, I doubt this will ever become a field reference.

Queensland’s Threatened Animals is a great resource in beginning to learn how threatened species conservation works within different legislative bounds and about the status of Queensland’s threatened animals and what actions are being taken to preserve them. For professionals in the fields of ecology and conservation however, the speed at which such information becomes out of date negates the overall usefulness of the book. I found the book interesting and informative to read the first time, as it expanded my knowledge of animals I’m not familiar with such as invertebrates and marine mammals, but beyond that I do not use it much at all.

As a guide to educate the general public to the state of Queensland’s threatened fauna, this is an excellent start, and I believe the addition of online content would dramatically improve its usefulness.

The Housing Bomb

Why our addiction to houses is destroying the environment and threatening our society

Peterson, M.N., Peterson, T.R. and Liu, J.
Johns Hopkins University Press
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MARTIN BRUECKNER¹

THIS book by Nils Peterson and colleagues offers a detailed overview of both the social and environmental consequences of western housing fetishism. Not only do the authors marshal some powerful evidence that attests to the dark side of humanity’s drive towards more and larger homes, they also spell out accessible guidance principles for one-planet housing and point to directions for

change across individual, regional, national and international scales. Whilst largely US-centric in orientation *The Housing Bomb* should resonate strongly across the political North, especially in countries like Australia where US housing patterns continue to be emulated.

The book is divided into a general introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. Chapters One and Two address prevalent household dynamics and their social and environmental consequences, which explain the notion of the “housing bomb”. The evidence presented describes the explosive growth of new and large detached homes across the developed world, which is responsible for the dramatic rise in the resource intensity of housing and its growing

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environmental footprint. This growing footprint the authors link to environmental problems such as wildlife extinction, climate change, water scarcity and the loss of prime agricultural land to only mention a few. In addition, a critical light is shed on the dream of private home ownership, and its allure of economic emancipation is questioned. The authors trace the last two hundred years of housing developments in the US until the 2007/2008 subprime mortgage meltdown and demonstrate how the concerted push towards private home ownership - despite being universally valued - has heightened the economic vulnerability of home owners, driven social injustice and racial segregation and indeed been undermining livability and community well-being.

Chapter Three and Four are based on empirical work conducted respectively in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in the US and the Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan Province, China. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem study is presented as an exemplar case of unsustainable housing development threatening national parks and natural areas globally. The study shows how the desire to live close to nature can come at the expense of nature and how the insistence on sacrosanct property right principles can override, and work against, the interests of communities. The Chinese case deals with the threat human settlements pose to the endangered giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) population in the Wolong Nature Reserve. Household dynamics in settlements within the reserve area have brought about the proliferation of households and been responsible for the rise in human resource use (e.g. fuel wood), resulting in the fragmentation of panda habitat. The study shows that it is household dynamics as opposed to human population size per se that more strongly determine anthropogenic impacts; insights that provide policy clues for biodiversity conservation in the Wolong Nature Reserve and beyond.

Chapter Five provides a user-friendly guide to household greening for the defusing of the housing boom. The authors help navigate the green product maze and offer a sound overview of the cost-effectiveness of various greening choices. The cost comparison is particularly telling for it makes plain how inexpensive effective pro-environmental solutions can be and does away with acculturated views about the cost associated with home greening and private transport alternatives. Issue is also taken with barriers to changes at the household level, revealing both structural and behavioural drivers that militate against a transition to more sustainable households.

Chapter Six expands on strategies at the individual and local level to addressing the housing bomb. The authors elaborate on various neighbourhood and community strategies that help shake car dependence, favour compactness and maximize affordability as well as drive social inclusion and ensure community-focused local development. Attention is directed to a variety of social engineering tools required to realign a society programmed to aspire to private home ownership. The focus here is on changing social norms by way

of educating society about the true cost of mainstream home ownership, highlighting the benefits of sustainable housing alternatives and by tapping into people's desire to improve their relative social ranking while at the same time counteracting wide-spread property rights concerns and homevoting behavior.

Chapter Seven extends the scale of the previous chapter, exploring policies that can be used at the national and international level. Discussed here are policy measures that help support, align and coordinate local and regional development efforts. Using the tools of regulation, economic incentives and information, governments can drive initiatives such as clean energy transitions, encourage sustainable housing developments and promote transport alternatives. In the international context, the proliferation of slums represents the housing bomb in the political South. In this regard, the western world can not only offer assistance and expertise in the transformation of rapidly growing urban slums but also learn from the high-density designs commonly found in slum environments. The authors warn that we ignore housing bombs at our own peril as the ripple effects of a country's housing crisis — as shown in the US subprime mortgage bubble — are felt widely in today's interconnected and globalized world.

Overall, *The Housing Bomb* is an eloquent exposé of the social and environmental ills associated with western housing trends. The book offers more than a social and ecological stock take of human settlements but provides deep insights into the political-cum-commercial drivers underlying society's continued faith in the increasingly uneconomic and risky enterprise of private home ownership. Peterson and his colleagues draw into question the dominant housing paradigm and point to housing alternatives that promise a future-proofing of communities in peak oil and climate change contexts and foster equity, community resilience and cohesion. This book is a compelling and accessible read beyond finger-pointing alarmism that presents a sound critique of the status quo and its historical antecedents and provides practical and realistic solutions to today's housing problematic.