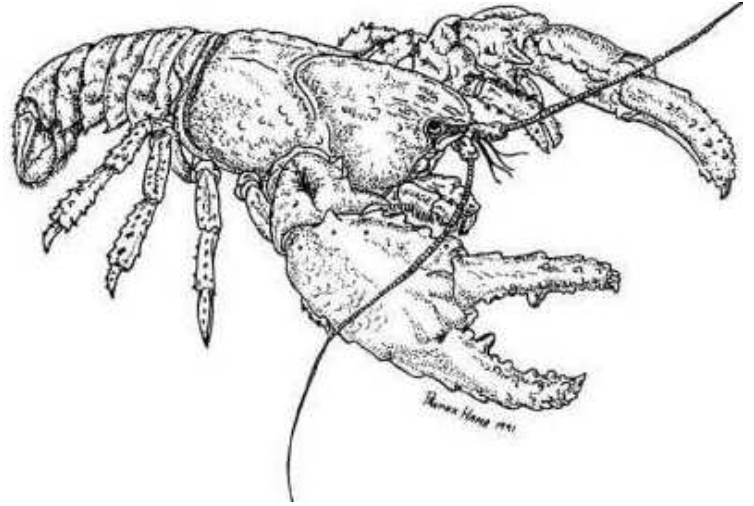


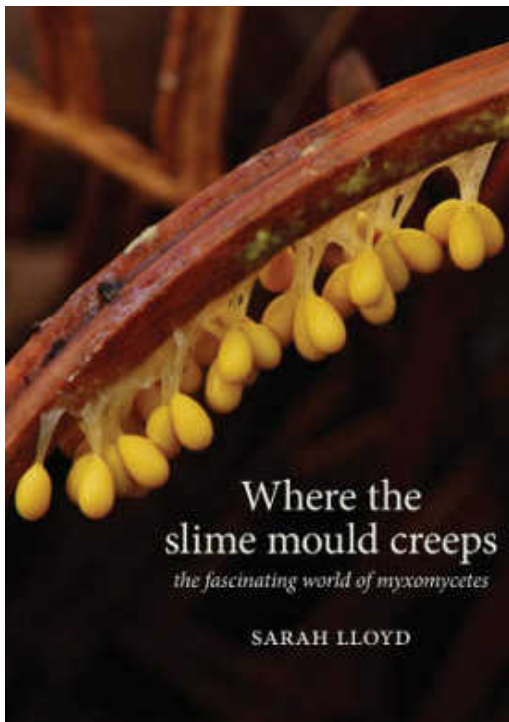
# Disjunct Naturalists

WEBSITE OF THE CENTRAL NORTH FIELD NATURALISTS



## *Review of S. Lloyd 'Where the slime mould creeps'*

by **T. Thekathyl**



Book cover

Slime moulds would have to rank amongst the most obscure of the common forms of life on earth. Although widely prevalent in most parts of the habitable world they are rarely seen by other than the initiated, and few ever recognize what may be before their very eyes.

The best explanation for this ignorance is the paucity of literature for the beginner. Apart from a short section on myxomycetes in Furher's fungi book<sup>1</sup> rest of the available literature is highly technical and forbidding for the novice. There has been no widely available hand-holding guide available for a complete novice to understand slime moulds.

Lloyd is to be commended for filling this vacuum by publishing what is hoped to be the first of her books on myxomycetes. I have to confess that despite having been familiar with slime moulds for several years it took a draft version of the present book

to realize that the plasmodium originates from a single zygote and was not an aggregation of millions of amoeba having a coroboree of sorts.

As the author points out early on, classification of these organisms has long been confusing, variously appearing under botany as well as under zoology. Myxomycota is now accepted as falling under the kingdom Protista which includes algae (and seaweeds which are *not* plants).

I found the most useful section of the book to be Part 1 discussing the biology of these organisms. It makes for slow reading because the unfamiliar terminology requires constant reference to the glossary. However we have also been provided images with superimposed text explaining the structure of fruiting bodies. Part 2 (p. 45-62, informal discussion on various related topics) and Part 3 (p. 63-90, image gallery) make for easier reading.

The book is illustrated with a large number of high quality macro- and micrographs. Despite their small size, mainly 55x45 mm, details are very clear.

Having read the book I need to make a second confession, that I am still in the dark about what makes these critters tick. They lack brains but demonstrate forms of intelligence in avoiding obstacles when searching for food in a maze. Researchers have found that the optimal paths used by *Physarum polycephalum* in searching for food in contrived situations are not dissimilar to the network of roads connecting major cities in several countries. This is of course no reflection on the book, merely an observation that we are dealing with complex organisms of which we know little.

The main criticism of the book is the lack of scale for images. Something along the lines of Malcolms' *Glossary*<sup>2</sup> showing scale bars with caption would have been very desirable.

Lloyd's modesty has inhibited her from revealing that one of her discoveries is new to science and has been named after her - *Alwisia lloydiae*<sup>4</sup>.

The author maintains a [log](#) on this site where further and updated information is available.

This book has the promise of becoming the standard work for beginners in the same way Fuhrer's has been for fungi and Meagher & Fuhrer's has been for bryophytes<sup>3</sup>. Appendices provide information on classification, a glossary, bibliography and a checklist of Australian myxomycetes. Available from Fullers, Petrarchs and Devonport Bookstore as well as online through [Fungimap](#).

[Book is now in the third edition.]

- <sup>1</sup>Fuhrer, B., *A Field Guide to Australian Fungi*, Bloomings Books Pty Ltd (May 2005) ISBN-10: 1876473517

- <sup>2</sup>Malcolm, W. & Malcolm, N. *Mosses and Other Bryophytes, An Illustrated Glossary, 2nd Edition*, Micro-Optics Press, 2006, ISBN 0958222479

- <sup>3</sup>Meagher, D. & Fuhrer, B., *A Field Guide to the Mosses and Allied Plants of Southern Australia*, Flora of Australia Supplementary Series, Number 20 - Australian Biological Resources Study/The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, 2003; ISBN 0 642 56828 6

- <sup>4</sup>Leontyev DV, Stephenson SL & Schnittler M, 'A new species of *Alwisia* (Myxomycetes) from New South Wales and Tasmania' *Mycologia*, 106(6), 2014, pp. 1212-1219

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## References