BOOK REVIEW

Max M. Houck,[1] *M.A.*

Review of: Hair ID: *An Interactive Tool for Identifying Australian Mammalian Hair*

REFERENCE: Brunner H, Triggs B. Hair ID: An interactive tool for identifying Australian mammalian hair, Ecobyte, Pty, Ltd., CSIRO Publishing, Victoria, Australia, CD Rom

Anyone who's studied animal hairs microscopically generally refers to Brunner and Coman's book (1), *The Identification of Mammalian Hair,* as "The Book." Very few comprehensive references are available for animal hairs and the interested microscopist must search and hunt for old and mostly out-of-print references (2). *Hair ID* is a modern and excellent addition to the animal hair literature. It is simple, fast, and flexible. An excellent training aid and reference, every forensic science laboratory and forensic educational program should own a copy of *Hair ID.*

The software has three modes: Look, Search, and Learn. "Look" is a browser, where the user can select taxonomic groups down to the species level and see what the various hair characteristics are for that animal (Cross-section, Medulla, Cuticle scale, Hair profile [what we might call morphology], and [geographic] Distribution). "Search" provides a mode for selecting characteristics to determine which have them. Finally, "Learn" is a wonderful tutorial that covers hairs, their traits, growth, techniques (including visual tutorials on using a Jolliff kit and making a scale cast), plus an extensive bibliography.

A wonderful part of the software allows the user to display an image they have collected from their microscope, enter it into the software's catalog, and then compare it with the references. New taxa and new reference images can be entered and become part of this virtual reference collection.

The only down side is that these are hairs from Australian mammals. I doubt if many North American, European, or Asian forensic scientists will run across a Yellow-bellied Glider, a Fat-tailed Dunnart, or a Rufous Bettong (images of the animals themselves are, regrettably, not included). Still, with the facility to enter new samples and using the CD's terminology as a guide, the more common local animal hairs encountered could be included.

The software can be installed on a computer or run directly from the CD. In an extensive review, not one glitch occurred (installed on my computer). The images are good, although some would have benefited from rendering the background white instead of gray.

Hair ID costs approximately $130 US, based on the retail price of $195 AU and is available from Antipodes Books & Beyond, 9707 Fairway Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901-3001. Phone: 301-602-9519, www.antipodesbooks.com.

Reference

1. Brunner H, Coman BJ. The identification of mammalian hair. Inkata Press, Melbourne, 1974.
2. Houck MM. A bibliography of hair references for the forensic scientist. Forensic Science Communications, Vol. 4, N1, [on-line: www.fbi.gov]. 2001.

[1] Director, Forensic Science Initiative, West Virginia University, 886 Chestnut Ridge Rd., Morgantown, WV.