

Book Review

WALKER'S MARINE MAMMALS OF THE WORLD. Ronald M. Nowak, with an Introduction by Randall R. Reeves and Brent S. Stewart. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8018-7343-6, 264 pp.

Among the many books published recently on marine mammals is this one, which actually consists of two main parts. The bulk of the book is simply a reprinting of the marine mammal sections from the large, two-volume set, *Walker's Mammals of the World*. The remainder of the book is a long and detailed "Introduction" to these animals, written by two well-known experts on the subject. I will critique each of these main parts separately as there is little connection between them (besides the physical one of being published in the same book). I should also note that there is additionally a detailed, eight-page "Foreword," written in an engaging and thoughtful manner by John Heyning, another world expert on marine mammals.

I will start with my review of the "Introduction," which was authored by Randall R. Reeves and Brent S. Stewart. This is a long chapter, covering some 64 pages. Reeves and Stewart are well-known for their history of contributions to the field of marine mammal biology as well as for their clear and concise writing styles. They have collaborated successfully on several previous projects, most notably the *Sierra Club Handbook of Seals and Sirenians* (with the late Stephen Leatherwood) and *Marine Mammals of the World* (with Phil Clapham and Buddy Powell). As in those previous efforts, Reeves and Stewart demonstrate a profound knowledge of the animals and of the literature that they are reviewing. Their "Introduction" to the *Marine Mammals of the World* starts with a summary of the taxonomy, diversity, and zoogeography of each of the various groupings of marine mammals, followed by a discussion of Habitat and Ecology and then Social Systems, Behavior, and Life History of each major grouping, and finally concluding with a summary of Conservation for each.

This introduction is both informative and easy-to-read. The authors make use of their detailed knowledge of the literature to highlight the salient features of marine mammal biology. The review is current and up-to-date as evidenced by the Literature Cited section, which lists about 385 references, some published as recently as 2002

(in fact, the authors state that they attempted to make their summary current through early 2002, and by all accounts they have succeeded). The "Introduction" is a pleasure to read, and even a seasoned marine mammal expert may learn a few things from it.

The remaining 100 pages of the book are composed of species (or groups-of-species) accounts, extracted virtually verbatim from the newest edition of *Walker's Mammals of the World*, a generally useful two-volume summary of all the world's mammal groups. The two-volume set was written by Ronald M. Nowak, a mammalogist who has not studied marine mammals. The first four editions of the *Mammals of the World* series were written by Ernest P. Walker (thus the name), and Nowak took over authorship on the fifth and sixth (current) editions. The intention of the publishers was obviously to allow people interested in marine mammals to gain access to the material without necessarily having to purchase the expensive (not to mention big and heavy) two-volume set, which they knew most would not do. A good idea, to be sure, but as we will see, there are problems.

The problems with the main section of the book stem from the same ones that confront any author dealing with a set of literature and a group of animals with which they are not intimately familiar. The accounts, while very detailed, are generally not a good summary of our current understanding of these animals. Much of the information is badly out-of-date, and even the taxonomic treatment is not representative of the mainstream thinking in the field. An example is the treatment of the Ganges and Indus dolphins as two species (*Platanista gangetica* and *P. minor*), rather than as subspecies of a single species, which is the arrangement now reflected in most lists in the field. A similar situation goes for the California, Galápagos, and Japanese sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*, *Z. wolfebaeki*, and *Z. japonicus*), which are listed in the book as members of a single species. While these recent changes may be controversial, the author does not seem to be aware of these controversies and clearly listed them as such due to his use of outdated information.

Nowak has made a noble attempt to summarize the vast amount of information on marine mammals here, but overall he falls well short of his presumed goal of producing a set of authoritative, up-to-date summaries of the various groups.

This results not so much from poor writing or bad organization but from a lack of the use of recent sources. The list of Literature Cited is extensive, citing about 1,000 papers and books, but the most recent reference listed is from 1996. This indicates that the main sections of the book were at least seven years out-of-date when the book was published in 2003!

This is not to say that *Walker's Marine Mammals of the World* has no value. As mentioned above, both the "Foreword" and the "Introduction" are very worthwhile summaries, and the photos included in the book (while mostly pretty poor) do have some useful examples. While the photo collection is conspicuously lacking in photos of live animals at sea, there are some shots of captive and dead specimens (that many will have not seen before), which do show the body shape of the animals quite well. They are all in black and white, however, and, therefore, are not very exciting to look at.

The big problem with this book is that there was little effort made to update the information and resources from the previous editions of the two-volume set. If such an effort had been made, and the result had been reviewed by appropriate experts on marine mammals, then this volume could have been more than just the mixed bag that it is.

Is it therefore worth the \$22.95 to purchase this book, simply for the nice "Foreword" and "Introduction," and the few examples of interesting photos? Well . . . maybe, but probably not. It really depends on your interest. I certainly would not recommend this book at the top of my list, but for someone who is looking for a nice summary of marine mammal biology, it does have value. However, my advice is this. Put a binder clip or a rubber band on pages 65-261 of this book (the Nowak-authored main section), and use mainly the introductory materials for reference. You could be badly misled by using the main sections, but you will find the "Introduction" on pages 1-64 to be delightful and informative. Let's hope that next time they contemplate a new edition, the publishers ask Reeves and Stewart to rewrite the entire book!

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