

## Book Review

ORCA: VISIONS OF THE KILLER WHALE. Peter Knudtson. Sierra Club Books for Children, 1996. ISBN 0-871-5690-6X, 110 pp.

This book is a paperback reprint of the 1996 original hardback. In the intervening time, the author has updated much of the text, but the pictures and layout remain similar. With so many beautiful photographs to choose from, it is a shame that the cover image is out of focus. Perhaps the designer was looking for an arty-type of shot. Living by the old adage of “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” I must say that it is eloquently written and portrays aspects of orca life in prose and with a style that is not often accomplished when dealing with detailed scientific findings. Overall, Knudtson’s book is a pleasure to read. Still, I do find it a bit disconcerting to have the author swap continuously, without apparent reason, between the terms killer whale and orca.

The book is self-proclaimed as being “scientifically precise,” yet there are glaringly obvious holes and errors. For instance, a map touting to show orca distribution has not been updated since the 1996 edition (and was based then on 1986 data). This map also lacks many areas of known distribution for the species. The most noticeable locations, to me, are off Antarctica—the whole continent itself is not illustrated and, hence, by default, orca are not found there. Additionally, the map shows that there are no orca off New Zealand, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina (Patagonia), and Papua New Guinea—all areas where scientific work has been conducted on orca. Indeed, these areas are not covered in the text either, giving the book a very typical and blasé angle of Pacific Northwest centric data, although small sections on some other studies do appear. Nevertheless, Knudtson includes a well-rounded reference list, which suggests scientific articles, dissertations, and popular style articles to appeal to all scopes of reader.

Throughout the text, there is a strong emphasis on orca in the wild, which is nice to see. Sadly, this theme was not carried through in the pictures, as many are obviously taken of orca in human care (the underwater windows of the aquarium are even apparent in some). Additionally, the live-capture industry for captivity is not discussed in terms of threats to some populations, such as those off Kamchatka, Russia. Overall, this is a book for the

layperson who would like more than just the average information, and for the scientist who likes well-written text and striking images of orca.

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