

Book Review

WHALES, DOLPHINS AND SEALS: A FIELD GUIDE TO THE MARINE MAMMALS OF THE WORLD. Hadoram Shirihai (Author), Brett Jarrett (Illustrator). A & C Black Publishers Ltd., London, 2006. ISBN 978-0713670370, 384 pp.

It has been 37 years since Captain W. F. J. Mörzner Bruyns (1971) published his field guide for the identification of cetaceans at sea. It was the first guide of its kind and was meant “to help, by making identification easier to satisfy the observers’ curiosity, and if they are keen enough, to provide information on professional zoology” (p. 7). The increased study of marine mammals over the past decades led also to an increased number of field guides being published. The DK Handbook, *Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises*, by Mark Carwardine (1995) being one of the most widely known and used. The present book by Hadoram Shirihai and Brett Jarrett is a new addition to the recent tradition of field guides. The authors worked together on a previous project which resulted in *A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife*, published in 2002 with a second edition in 2007.

Shirihai and Jarrett consulted a number of renowned scientists during the preparation of their field guide; one of them was an editorial consultant for the guide by Carwardine as well. The set up of this field guide is different in the sense that it uses the structure similar to ones often used to identify birds and—unlike, for instance, the Carwardine guide—incorporates all marine mammals, not only cetaceans.

The first thing one notices when picking up the book is the impressive amount of information which is provided in combination with many excellent photographs and beautiful drawings of the different species, presented in a very compact book in which every space was used. It is a book which describes not only whales and dolphins but also pinnipedia, sirenia, otters, and polar bears. Especially the latter four are often not incorporated with whales and dolphins in one field guide. The fact that one can see whales, dolphins, seals, and otters on one boat trip proves how right the authors were to bring all of these marine mammals together in one guide.

Marine mammals are observed by a wide range of people: from the tourist who accidentally passes by, to the professional scientist working in the field of marine mammals. The requirement for

information for each group is different; therefore a field guide fitting all groups of “marine mammal spotters” is a very difficult task. Observing marine mammals in itself is a difficult task and requires a lot of experience. On many locations and trips, only a glimpse of the animal is caught, and a trained eye is often necessary to see anything at all. Luckily, a few well-known locations exist where this is not the case, where there are always marine mammals present, and where trips are nearly always successful. At these locations, one has the opportunity to observe the animals for more extended periods of time. The guide lists some of these locations, and by searching the Internet for the locations listed in the book, one quickly obtains the information one needs to plan a trip.

There are generally two ways to organise marine mammals trips: one might employ a professional operator, or one could venture out alone. Nowadays, there are many “marine mammal tour operators” whose business it is to show people the beauty of these animals. They are usually very well-informed and provide the participating tourist with identification and information on the species. At the same time, they are well-informed about local populations and circumstances, so employing them is always an excellent way to quickly see and learn about the marine mammals in the vicinity. If one ventures out alone, or goes out on a ship without experienced tour guides on board, the situation is different. One needs a clear, easy to access field guide which can support the identification of observations. The guide by Shirihai and Jarrett can be used in order to provide this support. It contains the basic data which would be helpful to know at the moment one observes a marine mammal. The fact that it provides so much information in a compact book requires a very efficient access system. As mentioned, Shirihai and Jarrett used one similar to those commonly seen in field guides for birds. The system requires careful study before use, but after that, it is very easy to handle. The application of the comparative plates in order to locate the relevant species is stressed by the authors of the guide. Indeed, while using the guide on a recent whale watching trip, observing some of the species for the first time, these comparative plates proved very useful. As the amount of information is placed closely together, one needs the access system which refers to the relevant pages—otherwise, one has to spend too much time going

through the densely packed pages. As it turned out, the photographs were an excellent preview of what was seen on the trip and a very effective tool in the identification of species. The drawings give a good idea as to what the animals look like out of the water. While viewing blue whales, it was possible to discuss interesting facts for this species with other participants on our trip. The book provides silhouette drawings which show the surfacing and diving whale as part of the species' description. Maps are given for each species, depicting the range and, if applicable, migration routes of the species. In general, the book provides very nice conversation material.

Identification of marine mammals remains a difficult task. Shirihai and Jarrett provide the user with all the tools they need, but one thing remains in the eye of the observer: experience. To know what one has to look for requires experience. To know the behaviour of the different species requires experience. The way they swim, jump, and breathe are all factors contributing to positive identification, and these skills can only be acquired by observing species in the wild. This book may provide a framework on which this experience can be built.

It may be concluded that the authors managed to bring together a huge amount of information in a very richly illustrated book. It is a book for the interested layman and professional alike. Enthusiastic tourists planning a marine mammal trip in advance (organised or independent) need to take the time to read the introduction and study how to use the book. By doing this, they will have access to a huge amount of information in a book which is not expensive and not cumbersome to take along. Attempting to use the book without studying the manual may prove difficult. The casual marine mammal observer who participates in an organised "spotting trip" is mostly likely accompanied by a tour guide. On such trips, the observer's attention is usually focused on the tour guide. After the trip, however, the book may be used by the observers to read more about the species observed during the trip. This book also may provide support to tour guides as it presents most of the information the tourist participating in such a trip would like to know. Overall, it is a very good contribution to the existing field guides, providing a present-day answer to the goal Captain Mörzer Bruyns set for his guide 37 years ago.

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