

THE HUNTING OF THE WHALE. Jeremy Cherfas. The Bodley Head, London (1988) 239 pp. £12.95.

This book, in words from the author's prologue is '... a selective history of whales and whaling. It is by no means absolutely exhaustive. Nor is it impersonal.' All this is true, as it is also true that the book is well-written, closely argued and essential reading for anyone wanting a clear understanding of how man over the centuries has used/overused whales for his own purposes.

The book opens with a general chapter on whale biology and this is followed by a short history of whaling up to the end of the 1930s. Then starts the more important part: an account of the manoeuvrings that led to the establishment of the International Whaling Commission in 1946 and the scheming, campaigning, political dealing and self-deception that followed.

We currently have a voluntary bank on commercial whaling although some 'scientific' whaling has been allowed for countries such as Norway and Iceland and, of course, there is some 'ethnic' whaling by Eskimos and others.

Jeremy Cherfas claims, perhaps with some justification, that the attempt to save whale stocks by regulating the annual catch probably had the effect of delaying the demise of the whaling industry. More

whales might have been saved if the industry had been allowed to collapse under its own economic weight in the late 1960s. He argues that the efforts of the conservationists and their encouragement of the so-called rational management of whale stocks may actually have been counterproductive. He also suggests that 'scientific' whaling will continue until it is no longer profitable for the participants; i.e. until the effort of catching the ever-decreasing stock, measured in monetary terms, is greater than the economic return from the catch itself.

All-in-all this book is a fascinating, depressing and revealing study. It is indeed one man's personal view of how the whales have been used, misused and abused, but it is a personal account which one suspects is very near to the truth.

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Andrew Greenwood asks me to remind readers that the above books and many more may be obtained at competitive rates from Chiron Publications, P.O. Box 25, Keighley, West Yorkshire, BD22 9UA, UK.