

Book Review

THE DOLPHINS OF HILTON HEAD: THEIR NATURAL HISTORY. Cara M. Gubbins. University of South Carolina Press, 2002. ISBN 1-57003-458-3. 69 pp. Soft cover price, \$9.00 US

The Dolphins of Hilton Head is a lay-person's book designed to give the reader an overview of bottlenose dolphins in the world relative to the Hilton Head, South Carolina community of dolphins. The book is organized into three chapters: (1) The Natural History of Hilton Head Dolphins, (2) Unique Characteristics of Hilton Head Dolphins, and (3) Dolphin Conservation. The book also includes a glossary and two appendices dealing with terminology and commonly asked questions about dolphins.

The overall impression of the book is that it was written for visiting tourists of the Hilton Head area. It is reader-friendly and easy to understand for the beginning dolphin watcher. Illustrations and black and white photos also give the reader some examples of behaviour and the photo-identification processes used for the author's research. Although there are no specific citations for the work described, a general reading list is given at the end of the book, as well as an index.

The first chapter is a good and simple review of the natural history of bottlenose dolphins around the world. Although the title of this chapter is the Natural History of Hilton Head dolphins, there are only sparse references to the specific dolphins of Hilton Head. Instead, chapter one is a 'crash course' on the basics of bottlenose dolphin biology, natural history, and sensory systems. By the end of this chapter, the reader is aware of the taxonomic divisions of marine mammals, anatomical and physical features of dolphins, evolutionary patterns, sensory systems, and reproductive behaviour. The chapter is useful in that regard.

The second chapter, as the title suggests, deals more specifically with the study community of Hilton Head bottlenose dolphins. This chapter describes the unique and interesting foraging strategies of these dolphins. Included are descriptions of

the famous strand-feeding behaviour, tidal strategies, and other foraging tactics. The author also reviews the social structure and social behaviour observed in this area. Nicely laid-out, is a discussion on how the dolphins in the Hilton Head area fit in to other communities of bottlenose dolphins along the Atlantic coast. Here, the author clearly describes more specifics from her work with this community of dolphins and puts the work into a larger context. This discussion is helpful to the reader to discover both the uniqueness and diversity inherent in bottlenose dolphin societies. One thing missing from this chapter is a clearly defined map of the Hilton Head area to help orient the reader. Multiple references are made to Calibogue Sound, but for those of us unfamiliar with South Carolina it is hard to visualize the layout of the land and how the dolphins utilize the area. This part of the book makes the reader feel as if they should be on a dolphin-watching tour in Hilton Head to fully appreciate the local references.

The third and final chapter focuses on dolphin conservation, specifically the illegal and unwise practice of feeding wild dolphins. Again, clearly directed to the tourist reading this book, the chapter gives some good explanations about the legalities and harmful effects on the dolphins from human impact. This chapter would be helpful to any whale/dolphin watching industries around as it gives the reader good facts about the harmful effects of this activity.

Although students and researchers of cetacean behaviour would be familiar with much of the general natural history from this book, it is a good beginner book for the high-school student and the avid dolphin-watcher in Hilton Head, as well as other areas where dolphins can be impacted by human activities.

Denise L. Herzing

Wild Dolphin Project, Jupiter, Florida, USA
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, Florida, USA