

## Book Review

**KILLER WHALES OF THE WORLD—NATURAL HISTORY AND CONSERVATION.** Robin W. Baird. Voyageur Press, Stillwater, MN, USA, 2002. ISBN 0-89658-512-3, 132 pp.

This book is a compact source of information on most aspects of killer whale natural history and conservation. It is designed primarily with the non-specialist or keen layperson in mind and is well illustrated with colour photographs. On the downside, some of the illustrations lack descriptive titles, and most do not state where they were taken—perhaps an important oversight, given the book covers killer whales of the world.

The author, well known for his scientific publications on killer whales and other cetaceans, starts some of the chapters with anecdotes about his encounters with killer whales and peppers the text with examples from other researchers. This gives the book a nice personal feel. It would have been a good addition to have seen a biography of the author (and perhaps a photograph of him at work), so the layperson could have a better understanding of Baird's achievements and current work in the field.

The text is divided into chapters headed; *Introduction, Foraging and feeding, Killer whales around the world, Living in groups, Sounds and senses, Killer whale culture, The species question, Research on killer whales, Conservation, A case study of conservation, and Human interactions*. This is followed by a brief section on *Killer whale facts* and *Where to see killer whales*, along with *Distribution maps*. This order follows a logical sequence; however, in some cases, within the chapters the text tends to 'jump around', which is an inherent problem when trying to deal with so many subjects. Tucked away on the last page is a small section on *Where to find out more about killer whales*. Personally, I would have liked to have seen this on the *Killer whale facts* page, but the placement may have been due to design constraints.

Most of the chapters offer information which has previously only been offered through scientific conferences, in scientific manuscripts, or as part of other studies and therefore could be difficult for the non-specialist to access. The chapter entitled '*Killer whale culture*' covers a topic which is controversial, to say the least. By using the definition '... at its root, culture appears to be shared information or

behaviour within a population that is transmitted through social learning' (p. 61) Baird clearly shows a scientific basis for the chapter. This Culture chapter should help to broaden the minds of scientists and laypeople alike, without the connotations of the 'whale-hugger' label.

The chapter entitled '*The species question*' attempts to address a difficult subject which has been in and out of favour for years. His discussion of the topic is centred around the 'fish-eating' and 'mammal-eating' killer whales of the Pacific Northwest coast and looks at the evidence for separating them into two species, which he is clearly in support of. He concludes the chapter with a paragraph suggesting that after detailed studies of other killer whale populations this separation into species may occur for them also.

The chapter on *Research on killer whales* is the longest, with 12 pages of text, yet it is a concise overview of research techniques. The methods used by the researchers are described clearly and typical research questions posed to illustrate points. Under the chapter *Conservation* Baird's comment '... given the high degree of population segregation that exists, it is probably important to manage threats to the whales on a population or community level, rather than on a species level.' (p. 95) is valid and illustrates his forward thinking approaches to dealing with the species. Governments and management groups alike could benefit from such a view.

As he lived and researched killer whales (albeit focusing primarily on mammal-eating whales) in the Haro Strait area for many years, Baird is well placed to comment on the case study of the 'Southern resident' killer whales (fish-eating whales). He states, on whale watching, 'there are more whale-watching boats than there are southern resident killer whales.' (p. 112) and offers suggestions for improving the interactions between boats and the whales. The last chapter *Human interactions* gives a few examples of close encounters with killer whales and humans, but also address the issues of attempting to feed them (not recommended!) and the growing cult-like symbol of the killer whale. In the section on *Killer whale facts*, under a sub-heading of *Popular Books*—Baird lists one (Ford *et al.*, 2000) of three volumes on killer whales of the Pacific Northwest, but does not list Matkin *et al.* (1999) and Ford & Ellis (1999).

The index is not very comprehensive, as you can not search by location, e.g., Norway, which is a shame, given there is various sections throughout the book on killer whales from different locations.

Overall, this book, published on good quality paper, with a nice layout and robust scientific information in a non-specialist format, is great value for money. It would be a worthwhile book to own, as part of a collection or to start a new interest.

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#### Literature Cited

- Matkin, C., Ellis, G., Saulitis, E., Barrett-Lennard, L. & Matkin, D. (1999) *Killer whales of Southern Alaska*. North Gulf Oceanic Society, Homer, Alaska.
- Ford, J. K. B. & Ellis, G. (1999) *Transients: Mammal-hunting killer whales*. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver.