

Book reviews

pathetic approach to whales have meant that increased attention has been paid to collecting data by watching whales rather than dissecting them. There has been a dearth of this kind of study on wild whales, especially many of the smaller ones not normally caught by commercial whalers. Indeed previous whale books have often been dominated by information about the larger species based on material collected by whalers. This book helps redress the balance a little.

It was disappointing to see only one page devoted to the perennially interesting topic of strandings, but perhaps 340+ pages are insufficient to cover fully one of the largest orders of mammals.

This book is thoroughly up to date and is distinctly different from the many others either written or based on whales as they were known a decade ago. In company with other volumes in this series, it is terse and authoritative in style, supported by a bibliography of 32 pages and many text figures. There are also some particularly fine colour photographs of wild whales (not taken in dolphinarium!), including one of a group of narwhals seen from the air.

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The Sei Whale: Population Biology, Ecology and Management

Joseph Horwood

Croom Helm, Beckenham, 1987, 373pp., HB £29.50

The sei whale is the third largest cetacean species. According to the early twentieth century whaling historian R. S. Haldane, it is also 'the most graceful of all the whales, as its proportions are so perfect . . .' Haldane further considered that ' . . . it is also far the best to eat, the flesh tasting of something between pork and veal, and quite tender.'

Unlike the likes of the right, sperm or bowhead, the role the sei has played in whaling history has been negligible. It was not fully described until 150 or so years ago, and was not exploited until more recently still; like most of the other

rorquals, the sei was too strong and too fast for the old whaling ships, and not until the advent of steampower and explosive harpoon grenades did it become a target for the world's whaling fleets. Even then, the sei wasn't intensively exploited until the 1950s, when the decline of blue and fin whale catches in the Antarctic made it the most profitable species to hunt. This honour was not only a dubious one, it was short-lived; after barely a decade, sei whale catches in the Southern Ocean peaked at around 22,000 and then sharply nose-dived, forcing the whaling industry to turn its attention to the hitherto-ignored minke whale.

It was during this period of intensive sei whale exploitation that scientists first started regularly taking samples from catches. As a result, there is a great deal more disparate information on the sei than there might otherwise have been, and much of it has been brought together in this detailed volume. Horwood—a principal scientific officer at the MAFF Directorate of Fisheries in Lowestoft, and a member of the British delegation to the International Whaling Commission—has summarized the material from several hundred papers on various aspects of the sei whale's physical characteristics, distribution, ecology and exploitation, and so provided a very worthwhile, comprehensive review of much of what is known about this species.

As the title implies, the emphasis of the book is on the sei whale's population biology and ecology, and the implications of this for the species's management. Thus, Horwood devotes some two-thirds of its content to describing such directly relevant details as stock size and separation, the history of sei whale exploitation, and reproduction, mortality and growth rates. He concludes by summarizing the state of our knowledge of the sei whale today, and recommending some possible research objectives for the future.

Unfortunately, although the text is of high quality, the typeface is, frankly, very poor, and looks as if it has been bashed out on the author's typewriter before being pasted up by the publisher. There are a few typographical errors, too, some of which—such as the graph that claimed that 20×10^{-3} seis were killed in one season—are slightly irritating.

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It is difficult to take issue with any of Horwood's points because, with the exception of the last chapter, he takes care not to express any subjective opinions whatsoever. Nonetheless, I did think some of his statements were slightly misleading, and would have benefited from further qualification. For example, while he is right to say that the commercial whaling moratorium was imposed 'even though it had been shown that reduced quotas could be agreed . . . and that some species could be counted in hundreds of thousands of animals', I felt Horwood could also have pointed out that the real bone of contention is not so much stock size, as whether it is actually possible to have a management regime that is profitable as well as sustainable. The general consensus at present—amongst non-whaling nations, at least—is that it is not. Besides, there is still an enormous amount of debate over the best way to calculate the likes of stock sizes and recruitment rates, and so, although there is universal agreement that, in principle, quotas can be set, and sustainable yields can be taken, just what those quotas, or those sustainable yields, should be is far less clear. That is the reason for the moratorium. Despite the fact that many people—myself included—would like to see commercial whaling end indefinitely, the moratorium is not, as Horwood implies, an unconditional, permanent ban, but a pause pending a comprehensive assessment of whale stocks.

However, these are relatively minor reservations, and probably rather unfair. Horwood's intention is not to debate the merits or otherwise of the moratorium decision, nor is it to consider the economic aspects of whaling. It is merely to describe, in as comprehensive a manner as possible, the sei whale's population biology, and so provide a factual base on which the reader can build his own opinions as to the most suitable of the management options available to us. In this, the author succeeds very well. *The Sei Whale* is a largely excellent reference book, and one that should be regularly consulted by all those concerned with the conservation and management of cetaceans.

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Rangelands: A Resource Under Seige

P. J. Joss, P. W. Lynch and O. B. Williams (editors)

Cambridge University Press, 1987, 634 pp., HB £55.00, \$79.50

This volume contains the proceedings of the Second International Rangeland Congress held in Adelaide, South Australia, on 13–18 May 1984. There were over 500 registrants from 42 countries and, partly because of the large number of participants, the meeting was divided into 13 symposia, which are published here in 13 corresponding sections. Only a selection of the 350 or so papers are published in full. These are the invited papers and the plenary addresses. The remainder are presented as unrefereed synopses, whose authors are urged by the organizers to publish as full scientific papers in appropriate journals. I am not sure that this is a satisfactory arrangement as there is no way of telling which contribution is a refereed paper and which a synopsis, apart from those in three sections where the convenors distinguish them in their introductory remarks. It is likely that many of the synopses will enter the literature as if they are orthodox papers. This is not an easy book in which to find one's way around for the table of contents lists only the section titles and there is no subject index. It is, therefore, a book to dip into and not to read from cover to cover. I do not claim to have read every word, although I suspect that I shall do so in time. Perhaps the section on 'Conservation and Wildlife' will interest *Oryx* readers the most, but many of the sections contain articles of interest to the conservationist.

With such a large number of contributions it is inevitable that the quality varies. Some say very little or report trivial results and would probably never have been written but for the need to prepare something to justify attendance at the conference. Conversely, there are many valuable and interesting papers for which I am pleased to have this book, although I doubt whether I would pay £55 for it. I would, however, encourage a university library to acquire a copy.

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