

Review: Whales and Dolphins of the World

By Mark Simmonds

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Mark Simmonds. *Whales and Dolphins of the World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2005. 160pp. ISBN 0-262-19519-4. U.S. \$29.95 (cloth)

The purpose of this book is described by the author himself, who is the director of science at the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society: "This book is intended as both a celebration of the whales and dolphins of the world and as an introduction to their diversity, biology and conservation" (p.8).

In chapter one, "Who Are The Whales and Dolphins", Simmonds categorizes the various species of whales and dolphins (cetaceans) living in the oceans and rivers of our planet. For instance, it is fascinating to learn that there are many different kinds of 'great whales': the minke whale reaches 35 feet (10.7 meters), the Bryde's whale reaches 51 feet (15.5 meters), the humpback whale reaches 53 feet (16 meters), the Sei whale reaches 61 feet (20 meters), the fin whale reaches 89 feet (27 meters), and the blue whale reaches 112 feet (34 meters). After a detailed introduction to the families of whales and dolphins, Simmonds discusses their intelligence and the adaptations that help them with their survival. Having recorded aspects of cetacean physiology, hunting techniques, reproduction, echolocation, language, communication, social structure and culture, Simmonds humbly comes to the conclusion that we actually know very little about them.

In the third chapter, Simmonds begins with a short history of interactions between humankind and these animals, and then presents our evolving attitudes towards them, as first they were hunted as a food resource, then caught to provide products to maintain our industrial revolution, and, now as whale-watching has become the focus of marine eco-tourism. After that, Simmonds insightfully argues that the major threats posed to cetaceans right now are incidental capture in fishing operation and habitat degradation, not intentional commercial hunting which is prohibited by the International Whale Commission (IWC).

In conclusion, Simmonds hopes that the conservation of cetaceans will become an integral part of our civilization and that co-existence between humans and cetaceans (for our sake as much as for theirs) can be supported and sustained. Without doubt, he has added a significant contribution to our knowledge and appreciation of whales and dolphins in this beautiful book

with more than one hundred eighty vivid images by SeaPics.com. This book is recommended to those who want to learn basic facts about whales and dolphins, as well as related issues including cetacean culture, habitat disturbance and destruction, fisheries policy, pollution, and conservation.

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