Book reviews

Fish Biology in Japan: an Anthology in Honour of Hiroya Kawanabe,

Hiroya Kawanabe was a leading Japanese fishery biologist who will be remembered for his excellent contributions to the rather controversial and interesting issue on the link between social behaviour and population dynamics/biology; a debate which was originated by the British scientist Professor Wynne Edwards with the publication of his book, “Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behaviour”, in 1962. Professor Kawanabe himself worked on Ayu ayu, commonly known as the sweet fish, when he contributed to the above concept by demonstrating that there was a tendency for foraging fish to defend feeding “lots” and the nature of changes that occurred at higher densities.

The present Volume, as the title implies, is a reproduction of a collection of articles previously published in the journal Environmental Biology of Fishes, all contributed by Japanese fishery scientists except the contribution by D.L.G. Noakes and the co-authorship of one of the invited reviews by K.D. Fausch. The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 – Biography, bibliography, and interview, Part 2 – Invited reviews (three), and Part 3 – Full papers and brief communications.

The bibliography illustrates the very broad interests of Professor Kawanabe and is a tribute to his output as a biologist. The three reviews are very informative but I would have liked to have seen a common theme, dealing with the aspects that Professor Kawanabe researched during his illustrious career. Part 3 contains 26 original contributions that were published previously, and covers a range of topics, on more than 15 species, and with a bias towards aspects related to reproductive biology. The contributions are arranged on a notional theme, and I believe it would have been useful and informative if Part 3 had been broken into subsections and each subsection to have had a short thematic summary. As it is, the book, is a carbon copy of a journal publication, packaged differently. Even though the book is produced to the high standards that is expected of the publisher, it raises the question why should the reader pay a high price (US $ 195.00) for a mere reproduction of a journal, the contents of which are wide ranging and therefore may not necessarily be of use to the average researcher and even to a post-graduate student. Accordingly, I shall be rather hesitant to recommend individuals the purchase of this Volume, unless one has closely followed the career of Professor Kawanabe. On the other hand, those libraries which already contribute to the
Developments in environmental biology of fishes series will be forced to purchase this Volume to ensure continuity. The journal Environmental Biology of Fishes in my view is a popular one, and most university and research institution libraries with an interest in fish are likely to subscribe to the journal. I shall be hesitant to encourage the purchase of this Volume by these, especially in the present milieu of funding limitations. I am also not convinced of the ethical and moral basis of attempts by publishers at further commercialisation of already published material.

Sena S. De Silva
School of Ecology and Environment,
Deakin University, P.O. Box 423, Warrnambool,
Victoria,
Australia, 3280

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Biology of Marine Mammals

This work was written with the objective of providing a much-needed textbook for students and academics wanting to teach marine mammalogy. To achieve this aim the editors brought together a series of authors to give an overview of their field of expertise. The book is then divided in ten chapters starting with a general introduction on marine mammals followed by reviews of specialised subjects such as environmental contaminants in marine mammals.

In the first chapter, Introduction, there is a fine example of the didactic nature of the book, the first pages concentrating on defining “what is a marine mammal” and why such different groups (from the phylogenetic point of view) as polar bears, sea otters, pinnipeds and cetaceans are all grouped under the same term (marine mammal). The introduction also goes on to describe each group in more detail, with the differences and similarities clearly explained, and is, thankfully, not too technical.

The second chapter deals with the Functional Morphology of the group. It is not as easy to read as some of the other chapters but that is in part due to the difficult subject matter and the amount of information provided. One aspect, which I think is a very good idea, and perhaps could have been provided in some of the other chapters as well, is a list of the abbreviations used in the text. By having all of them grouped in one place it provides a useful tool for any student browsing through the chapter.

The third chapter explores the physiological adaptations marine mammals have achieved to live in water. In an informative (and exhaustive) way it tackles a ‘not-so-easy’ subject but nonetheless a fascinating one. It deals with the topics of breath-hold diving (including a section on human divers as a comparison), temperature regulation, resistance to high pressures, navigation underwater, and maintenance of water and salt balance.