

Book Review

WOLFGANG GEWALT 2001. *Der Weißwal*. The Beluga Whale. Westarp Wissenschaften, Hohenwarsleben, ISBN 3-89432-836-3, 230 pp.

There are very few scientific books on toothed whales in the German language, and even fewer dedicated to a single species of odontocetes. Hence, it is a pleasure to read the second edition of the renowned and highly scientific monography series, *Die neue Brehm-Bücherei* published in 2001 on the beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*). The author, Dr. Wolfgang Gewalt, is a well-known cetacean expert with several decades of hands-on experience: as former director of Duisburg Zoo, he has captured and kept beluga whales successfully since 1969.

The new edition of the book with 230 pages follows the format and the structure of the first, 1976 edition closely, indicating that the first book already covered many important aspects of the species' natural history. However, the layout has been greatly improved and many photos benefit from the much better printing quality. To bring the book up to date, new scientific findings of the last two decades have been added and some chapters were re-written extensively. The number of references has grown by 50%, with 72 new references added, but also keeping the citation of some of the earliest scientific publications on white whales, dating back to 1625 and 1723.

The special value of this book lies in its large amount of details, many of which are from literature that is hard to find, or based on the personal

experience of the author. Therewith, some information provided is hardly available elsewhere, like, for instance, exact organ weights for white whales, observations on intraspecific killings of female beluga whales observed in the wild, and some unique photo documentation of cases like a spine malformation in a beluga from the St. Lawrence estuary and the attack of a female beluga whale on a diver.

The most extensive changes have been made in the last two chapters concerning the interactions between humans and beluga, including the human impact on the wild populations, as well as the practical experience of Dr. Gewalt with the beluga whales at Duisburg Zoo. The large number of drawings and black-and-white photos document many different aspects of the species' natural history, as well as the author's experience on beluga capture and husbandry.

In summary, the second edition of *Der Weißwal* is an excellent collection of valuable and often unique and detailed information on this species; this collection, paired with Gewalt's talent for easily understandable scientific writing, makes the book equally suitable for the interested layman, students, or scientists dedicated to marine mammals.

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