

## Book Review

WHALING AROUND THE WORLD. Editor: Kathy Happynook. World Council of Whales (WCW) Publications. ISBN 0-9733760-0-7, 74 pp.

This small paperback was produced under the auspices of the World Council of Whalers and is intended as a popular guide to the various whaling communities around the world. *Whaling* is interpreted here as any of the species for which the common name in English is *whale* (i.e., it is broader than the 13 species of Great Whale generally recognised). Whaling in 12 areas is covered: Canada, Caribbean, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Russia, and the USA. Whaling operations covered include what might be termed “aboriginal subsistence whaling,” “small-type whaling,” and “scientific permit whaling.” Some whaling operations are regulated internationally (e.g., by the International Whaling Commission), some are regulated nationally but in the context of an international agreement (e.g., the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission), and some are under national regulation with various levels of national control (sometimes minimal). Whaling is a controversial subject that incorporates a wide variety of issues from conservation science, sustainable utilisation, culture, nutrition, killing methods, economics, ethics, and politics. Rarely are these discussed in a consistent and coherent manner. Generally, people start with the answer (they are either pro or anti) and then choose those aspects of the various issues that support their case and ignore those that do not, sometimes with little regard to facts where these are inconvenient. Such “religious” approaches can be argued to be detrimental to both whale conservation and whaling communities.

As one might expect, this book is written from the perspective of the whaling communities, unlike the vast majority of popular books on whales and whaling, at least in the west. From one viewpoint, the book fills a role in “balancing” the exaggerations often present in the literature of some anti-whaling lobby groups; however, there are a number of places where it falls into the same trap that they do in being “economical” with the truth when a particular strand of evidence may not support its viewpoint. A few examples include not referring to the critical status of some narwhal and beluga stocks, quoting a world or ocean area

abundance estimate for comparison with a local catch level (e.g., sperm whale catches in Indonesia), or by ignoring uncertainties or disagreements over some aspects of abundance and sustainability (e.g., when referring to the IWC Scientific Committee’s view of the status of North Pacific common minke whales). This is very disappointing if deliberate, and it should have been removed at the editorial stage if accidental. In addition, it detracts from much interesting information on other aspects of whaling in the various regions.

The style and level of detail varies considerably from chapter to chapter—in some cases, this reflects current knowledge (or lack thereof); however, in others, the book would have benefited from a heavier editorial input to standardise the content. Perhaps the most surprising entry was one for New Zealand. In fact, that entry does not describe current whaling(!) but, rather, talks about the past traditions of Maoris with respect to whales and whaling, noting that their traditional rights to utilise stranded whales had been rescinded in 1978. This has been relaxed slightly, giving them access to bone and teeth for carving. It also states that Maoris do not generally support New Zealand’s anti-whaling stance.

Although there is an extremely large white space content, this short book is generally well-produced with a number of interesting colour illustrations. It makes an interesting read provided that, as with any books or articles either for or against whaling, you don’t suspend your critical faculties while reading it.

Greg Donovan, Ph.D.  
Head of Science  
International Whaling Commission  
The Red House, 135 Station Road  
Impington, Cambridge CB4 9NP  
United Kingdom