

Book Review

ENTANGLEMENTS: THE INTERTWINED FATES OF WHALES AND FISHERMEN. Tora Johnson. University Press of Florida. 2005. ISBN 0-8130-2797-7. 289 pp.

This aptly titled book chronicles the tangled fates of humans and whales that make their living in the Gulf of Maine, Cape Cod Bay, and in the waters around Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Tora Johnson, who teaches at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, and considers herself both a fisherman and a scientist, shares a personal and compelling account of the fishermen in this region and their nondeliberate killing of North Atlantic right whales and humpback whales by entanglement in fishing gear. Johnson's material is drawn from her own observations and experiences and those she has gleaned from individuals on all sides of this complicated issue. Through photographs and interviews, she introduces such notable whale scientists as "Stormy" Mayo, Jon Lien, and Scott Krauss; marine mammal protectionist and animal rights activist Sharon Young; and New England fishermen Jon Our, Lloyd Sullivan, and Robin Butler. It is in getting to know the personal histories, motivations, and struggles of these and other individuals that a more balanced understanding begins to emerge from the political, social, and ethical turmoil surrounding the dilemma of whale entanglement.

Balancing the authentic and often riveting depictions of individuals and events is a wealth of supporting information. Detailed maps illustrate the coastal topography, the fishing areas frequented by humans and whales, and the mazes of temporary and permanent protected marine spaces that checker the region. Schematic drawings show the configuration and placement of the gill nets, traps, and trawls used to entrap fish and lobsters, and these simple graphics go a long way towards explaining how it is that whales can become so desperately entangled in these gear and the virtually indestructible synthetic ropes and buoys that moor them. Black-and-white photographs spread throughout the text give additional dimension to the people, whales, and situations described by Johnson, who manages to communicate the morass of legal and regulatory issues involved by connecting them to the personal stories she tells.

One of the ways that Johnson provides the backdrop for the current conflict is by recounting the details of the groundfish crash of the 1980s

and early 1990s, which dealt such a devastating blow to the confidence that New England and Newfoundland fishermen once had in fishing management. According to Johnson, these fisheries, along with others, quickly came into conflict with the conservationists and environmentalists who were trying to protect fish stocks from unsustainable levels of exploitation. As the whale entanglement problem was revealed and impromptu rescue teams began to appear as additional players in the scene, many of the fishermen who had managed to hang on in the industry grew even more embittered and mistrustful of outsiders. Throughout the text, I found Johnson capturing the reactions of these frustrated fishermen in conflict with whale protectionists and scientists in a way that was both objective and empathetic.

There are numerous impassioned examples of both conflict and collaboration among the fishermen and conservationists. In one such example, entitled "Sparring with the Leviathan" (Chapter 9), the author is taken by Wayne Ledell (Coordinator of the Newfoundland Entrapment Assistance Team) to observe a huge humpback whale entangled and frantically thrashing about in a gill net. In an exchange with some fishermen in the bow of a nearby boat hauling similar fishing gear, one exasperated man said to Johnson, "Just shoot 'im," while his father said, "Bring back the whale hunt." When the fishermen found out that she was a writer doing research on whales and on the attitudes of fishermen toward whales, one of them summed up his feelings by telling her "Soon, there'll be a million of 'em and no fishermen." In another chapter, fittingly entitled, "Pissing on Trees: Fishermen and Conservationists Lock Horns," Johnson describes the first and second gathering of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, consisting of fisherman, conservationists, scientists, and state officials from Massachusetts—each with their own agenda, and each group clearly marking their own territory. The way the author describes this meeting, the amount of sarcasm and bitterness shown by the assembled participants, particularly the fishermen and the whale protectionists, was absolutely palpable. It is clear that there is little trust between these groups, which places state and federal officials attempting to solve this problem between a rock and a hard place.

Nevertheless, when the author surveyed all the groups concerned with the entanglement issue

regarding their attitude towards whales, fishermen, and fisheries, she found that both fishermen and whale protectionists generally agreed with the proposition that protecting endangered whales such as the North Atlantic right whales, whose total population hovers just under 300, should be a primary priority for state and federal regulators; however, whereas fishermen placed their highest priority on preserving the lifestyle and culture of fishing communities (although not necessarily on maximizing fishing opportunities per se), environmentalists and animal rights activists asserted that the well-being of whales should take priority over the well-being of fishing communities. Clearly, fishermen are deeply concerned about their communities, which have relied on fishing for centuries, even at the expense of a whale's suffering and death. In contrast, the majority of animal rights proponents think that when a rescue team attempts to extricate a whale from fishing gear, its primary objective should be to relieve the whale's suffering, even above the safety of the first responders and their team members (Chapter 6, "What Do Whales Know?").

In light of a recent study on Americans' perceptions of marine mammals and their management, it would appear that the vast majority of the public is supportive of the animal rights activists when it comes to the safety of whales, dolphins, pinnipeds, and other marine mammals (see Bekoff, 2002). Therefore, in order to garner public support, scientists working in this field have to demonstrate that their research has significant scientific and educational value in the protection of individuals of an endangered population or species. Johnson's book is filled with stories demonstrating how scientists leading rescue teams, like Stormy Mayo and Jon Lien and their assistants, have strongly bonded with the whales that they have helped to free; however, these studies related to the freeing of individual whales involved in entanglements in fishing gear need to be augmented by focused research, which examines preventative measures such as placing noisemakers to deter whales from approaching gill nets and fish and crustacean traps. Further, the continuation of ongoing risk assessments and break-away gear development are necessary in order to identify preventative measures that may be taken to protect whales from potential harm.

In summary, I would recommend this book to anybody interested in the current clash of cultures and personalities among fishermen, scientists, and whale protectionists. No matter what the reader's initial bias is, there is no doubt that a broader understanding of the issues involved and an increased sensitivity for the participants will be gained. Johnson's informative, detailed, and very

personal account of the effort to save both critically endangered whales and a way of life provides one very tangible example of the many worldwide conflicts arising from constant human demands for finite resources from the environment.

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