

BOOK REVIEWS

Tonie E. Roche
troke@usgs.gov

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Marine Mammals of the World: A Comprehensive Guide to Their Identification.

By Thomas A. Jefferson, Marc A. Webber, and Robert L. Pitman. Illustrations by Brett Jarrett. Elsevier, Academic Press, Oxford, UK. 2008. 573 pp. ISBN 978-0-12-383853-7. US \$69.95 (hardback).

Review by Frances Gulland

This guide to marine mammals is the latest guide to these animals that fascinate not only many wildlife disease professionals but also the general public. Such guides are regularly produced because of the broad interest in identifying marine mammal species by a wide range of people, including students of all ages, tourists, and wildlife managers, as well as wildlife disease professionals. These guides differ in the breadth and depth of information given, their target audience, the accuracy of species descriptions, the utility of keys in distinguishing species, and their ease of use and handiness in the field (size, weight, and durability). This guide is the most up-to-date of recent guides and is pitched at a generalist audience but gives thorough species accounts and excellent dichotomous keys that make it particularly useful to wildlife disease professionals likely to examine skulls and beached carcasses.

The guide has 12 chapters, the main three chapters consisting of individual species accounts of the cetaceans, pinnipeds, and sirenians. These species accounts go through each individual marine mammal species; describe species it can be confused with; give species characteristics, distribution, ecology, prey, behavior, threats, and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) status (although not the US Endangered Species Act listing status); and list useful references. The pages for each species account are marked along the edge of the book in different colors for easy reference, and each account is beautifully illustrated with both photographs and drawings of the animals.

These illustrations help with identification at sea, as well as when examining an animal beached on land.

Other chapters include a chapter on basic marine mammal biology, which is an informative overview; a chapter on taxonomic groupings, which is an unusual section for most guides but extremely useful; a glossary; useful references; and the really distinguishing feature of this book, a chapter of dichotomous identification keys based on external appearance and skull morphology. These latter keys are very useful and are unusual in most field guides to marine mammals. Furthermore, most field guides are for a limited range of marine mammals, whereas this one covers all known species of marine mammals, including a couple only discovered in the last 5 yr. Thus, the wildlife professional armed with this guide should be able to identify a marine mammal at sea, dead on the beach, or from a skull, and have a good set of basic biologic information necessary to understand health threats. The section on threats is useful for managers and veterinarians not familiar with the conservation status of a particular species but who need a quick orientation.

This guide is thus an excellent addition to the library of any wildlife disease professional, providing all the current information on basic species identification needed to identify, and have a basic understanding of, a marine mammal observed at sea or on the necropsy table. The guide is useful for students, biologists, managers, and veterinarians alike. It stands out from the many other smaller or older field guides to marine mammals currently available because of its breadth of information, its beautiful illustrations, and its carefully constructed dichotomous keys. I thoroughly recommend it to all marine mammal enthusiasts as a quintessential guide to species identification.

Frances Gulland, Director, Marine Mammal Center, Marin Headlands, 2000 Bunker Road, Fort Cronkhitte, Sausalito, California 94965 (Gulland@Tmmc.org).