

Book Reviews

Cetaceans in the North Sea

Whales and dolphins of the North Sea. C.J. Camphuysen & G.H. Peet 2006. Fontaine Uitgevers BV, 's Graveland, The Netherlands. 159 pp. ISBN-10: 90 5956 2216 or ISBN 13: 978 98 5956 2219 [in English]. ISBN-10: 90 5996 157 or ISBN-13: 978 90 5956 1 [in Dutch].

In recent years there has been a surge of public interest in cetaceans in the Netherlands and Belgium, not the least because of the growing number of sightings and strandings of cetaceans in the southern North Sea. These events have been documented in specialised journals such as *Lutra* and the *Journal of Applied Ecology* but, until now, a more popular publication for a broader audience has been lacking. At the start of the International Year of the Dolphin a new book by Kees Camphuysen and Gerard Peet, *Walvissen en dolfinen in de Noordzee*, meets this demand. The book was initiated by the North Sea Foundation (Stichting De Noordzee) and presents an up to date review of the occurrence and distribution of cetaceans in the Dutch and Flemish parts of the North Sea. It is illustrated with numerous photographs and with drawings by Frits-Jan Maas, who had already worked with Gerard Peet on their earlier book (Peet, G., H. Nijkamp, P.-H. Nelissen & F.-J. Maas 1992. *Bruinvissen, dolfinen en walvissen van de Noordzee*. M.& P., Weert, the Netherlands). Much however has changed since the publication of that book.

This new book contains an interesting introduction, followed by accounts of the different species. The introduction describes the North Sea environment from its genesis onwards. It discusses fossil records of cetaceans and gives a brief history of the transition from whale hunting to dedicated research which now provides the (primary) source of information. This section illustrates how the monitoring of living cetaceans is more or less a by-product of a nationwide sea

watching scheme supported since the early 1970s by dedicated volunteer birdwatchers.

The species accounts are divided in four sections. These are based on abundance, ranging from common residents (three species: harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and white-beaked dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*)) to extinct (one species: gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*)). Depending on the status of the species and available data, the authors describe seasonal and distributional patterns in the (southern) North Sea, illustrated with graphs and distribution maps. In addition they provide a brief summary of how to identify the species, their ecology and distribution in the (Northeast) Atlantic. The resulting species accounts are rather extensive, with, for instance, two pages devoted even to the extinct gray whale.

The occurrence of species is described for different periods: the ancient past, before 1900, 1900-1960, and 1960-2005. Though highly anecdotal, descriptions from the past provide a historical context. Not surprisingly, the most recent data are the most detailed. Most species are only known from strandings, clearly showing that the shallow North Sea is not a prime habitat for most cetaceans.

Reading the species accounts, one thing is striking: how the identification, even of easily identifiable species, frequently poses a problem. The publication of a Dutch identification guide might help address this. Perhaps Kees Camphuysen could update his 1987 identification guide, the "Handleiding voor de determinatie van walvisachtigen (cetacea) in het Noordoost-Atlantisch gebied." ("Handbook for the identification of cetacea in the Northeast Atlantic")

Compared to Gerard Peet et al's earlier book on cetaceans, this new book contains more detailed information, especially on the distribution and seasonal occurrence of live animals. Overall, this book is a pleasure to read, containing a plethora of information on cetaceans.

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