

Terry Langford reviews a new book, the

Identification guide to the inshore fish of the British Isles

written by past Council member Peter Henderson

Many books may claim to be aimed at a variety of audiences with wide ranging levels of expertise and some actually manage it. This is one of those books. At this stage, I should declare an interest because I was a colleague of the author in the 1970s and 1980s and I worked with Pisces Conservation Ltd on a project in 2000. Despite this, I hope this review is truly objective.

The book begins with a clear, illustrated pictorial key to the main taxonomic groups and references to the relevant pages of the main text. The preface of the book notes that it is intended for everyone with an interest in fish including anglers, professional fishermen, fish merchants, naturalists and professional biologists. I would have added students from ages 15 (or even younger), to post-graduates. Some groups will use the book for initial reference to a specific taxonomic group while others will get an intriguing overall introduction to the highly diverse and complexity of near-shore fish assemblages. The book is based



on a very large number of excellent photographs of fish and selected morphological characteristics using a two-page spread format for each species. The photographs are augmented where necessary with clear line drawings, distribution maps and figures. Unfortunately I found some of the axis labelling on

the figures very small and difficult to read even with a magnifying glass. If the book is reprinted in the future I would recommend enlarging these axis labels even if fewer points are labelled as a result. Younger eyes may find less difficulty. There is an excellent glossary at the beginning

◀ of the book. Further, there is an unusual set of photographs of otoliths with examples from each major fish group and the author's colleague Mark Cox is noted as having developed a special expertise in extracting otoliths from fish over a wide range of species and sizes. In addition Rowena Henderson has contributed her expertise as a bio-archaeologist to add notes on human consumption for some species. The author also generously acknowledges the stimulation he received from earlier excellent books by Alwynne Wheeler (Wheeler, A. (1969). *The Fishes of the British Isles and North-West Europe*. London, U.K.: Macmillan and Co.) and Frances Dipper (Dipper, F. E. (2001). *British Sea Fishes*, 2nd edn. Teddington, U.K.: Underwater World Publications).

In the present book, web references are given to angling organisations and sea-fishing groups and the page layout for each species is introduced and explained in the preface. Each two-page spread begins with a description of the specific diagnostic features along with a photograph and a labelled line drawing showing these features.

Seasonality of occurrence, food and descriptions of similar species are included together with a summary of the life-history and maximum sizes. Notes on commercial fishing and angling are given where relevant and record sizes for each species given where known. As the author comments, the book is actually the result of the combined expertise of the Pisces Conservation Ltd team of ichthyologists with a range of talents, including Richard Seaby and Robin Somes plus a team of people sampling in the field and named professional fishermen. Many of the data have come from a long and extensive series of samples taken over some 35 years from the intakes of power stations in various parts of the U.K., the results of which have been published extensively in the scientific literature.

The book is dense with pictures and facts and is likely to be mostly used as a reference book rather than a prolonged read but, as such, it is probably the most comprehensive book of its kind available. However, if one has any interest in fishes at all, it is difficult to stop turning the pages once started. On the rear cover the book claims to be 'the definitive

guide to British marine fish' and although a somewhat slightly immodest claim, it is probably true. The cost of the book, in contrast, is extremely modest and within a price range to suit the audience range even if it includes students. The book is obtainable directly from Pisces Conservation Ltd (IRC House, The Square, Pennington, Hampshire SO41 8GN, U.K.) and online at www.pisces-conservation.com.

Full details: IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO THE INSHORE FISH OF THE BRITISH ISLES, written by past Council member Peter Henderson. (321 pp. Published by Pisces Conservation Ltd, Pennington, U.K., 2014. Price £25.00. ISBN: 978-1-904690-63-4.

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