

Book reviews

Sharks. A Photographer's Story

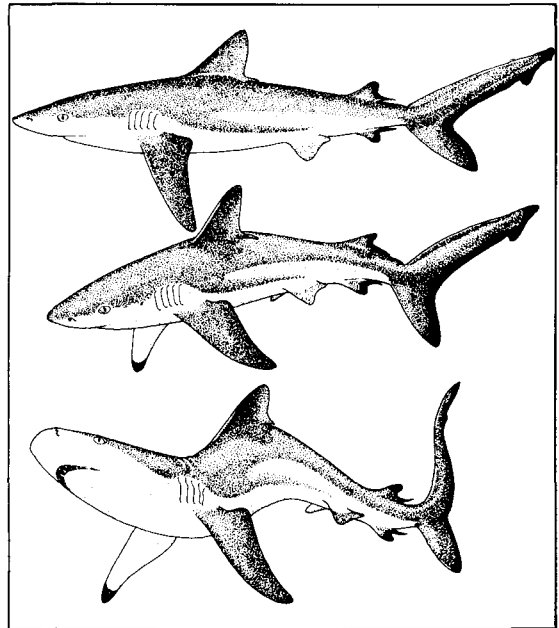
Jeremy Stafford-Deitsch

Headline, London, 1987, 200 pp., HB £14.95

Unlike bony fish, sharks grow slowly and have a low reproductive rate (most give birth to only a few young after a long gestation period), so that they are at particular risk from overfishing, and long-term shark fisheries are probably not sustainable. Therefore it is important to know more about shark biology and to dispel the myths that have grown up about them so that a rational approach to the conservation of threatened species can be made. Most books on sharks are illustrated by photographs of dead sharks and by pictures of small species taken in aquaria, but this excellent book is profusely illustrated by unique photographs of sharks in the wild, giving a very different idea of the real nature of the form and variety of these fascinating fish. The author has successfully combined an entertaining narrative of his world-wide search for underwater shark photographs with much up-to-date information about sharks and their natural history and behaviour. Although he modestly remarks that he is not a scientist, the second chapter, which deals with the structure and classification of the 300 or so species of shark alive today, is one of the best short summaries for the non-specialist of the nature of sharks that I have found in any book. Only a very few small errors have crept in, one being that it is not now thought that the megamouth shark has luminous organs in its mouth to attract its shrimp-like prey (p. 10). Again, the highly remarkable electroreceptive system of sharks (capable of detecting electrical fields as small as that produced by a 1.5 v torch battery at 1500 m!) consists of sensory cells clustered in ampullae, which are linked to the skin surface by low resistance jelly-filled tubes, and would certainly not work if their pores were filled with wax, as stated on p. 34. But these are small points and, as a whole, the book is accurate and up to date, and a great deal of information is given in an interesting and very readable way. This is a book to be strongly recommended to anyone who wants to know more about sharks, and should do much to show why we must try to preserve this very striking and remarkable group of fish.

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Line drawings from *Sharks. A Photographer's Story* depict the normal swimming posture (top), mild threat display (centre) and acute threat display (bottom) of the grey reef shark.

The Natural History of Whales and Dolphins

Peter G. H. Evans

Christopher Helm, Ltd, Kent, 1987, 343 pp., £13.95

Cetaceans seem to have attracted more than their fair share of books and this one ventures on well-trodden ground, but with a difference. There are 118 pages devoted to the expected chapters on who's who, what cetaceans are, how they evolved and where they are found. The difference comes in the later emphasis on behaviour and on British examples. There is also more about the smaller species, with less on the familiar great whales and how to kill them. Whale watching from the land and on special cruises has become popular lately; increasing knowledge about wild whales and also the demand for it. Peter Evans himself mounted such an expedition in 1980 off the continental shelf west of Britain, and co-ordinated the Mammal Society Cetacean Group, enabling the noteworthy emphasis on British species in his book. Recent developments in techniques and a more sym-

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