

## **A.D. McIntyre (ed): Life in the world's oceans—diversity, distribution and abundance**

**Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2010, XIX + 361 pp, £120/US\$199.99/  
€155 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4051-9297-2**

**Malcolm Jobling**

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Having read the advance publicity for this Census of Marine Life consortium book, my expectations were high. The publisher describes the book in glowing terms, using several superlatives and a fair smattering of florid language. Unfortunately, the book did not live up to my expectations. I may have been misled into believing that the book was something it was never intended to be. Further, early in my reading, I reacted negatively to some aspects of writing style and presentation; no doubt based as much on personal tastes and preferences as upon objective criteria. These first impressions may have left indelible marks that persisted to colour my overall assessment and final judgement. To quote from the publisher's publicity material, I was led to believe that *Life in the World's Oceans* '...is a true landmark publication.....provides a huge wealth of distilled information...puts marine diversity in the foreground of the scientific landscape'; in my opinion, the book fails to deliver the goods, primarily because many of the results from the Census of Marine Life initiative have yet to be fully analysed, and the information available has not been distilled and refined to the degree needed to provide the non-specialist reader with a holistic synthesis and overview of the numerous fascinating facets of marine biodiversity.

As I gradually worked my way through the book, I increasingly felt that both concept and presentation were somewhat idiosyncratic, and I also began to wonder for whom the book had been written; perhaps for those (claimed to be in the thousands) directly involved in Census of Marine Life projects? One source of irritation was that several chapters are very much project summaries or catalogues; reading like an expanded version of a final report that one would submit to a funding body such as a Research Council. In these chapters, excessive flag waving and the blowing of trumpets frequently work to the detriment of synthesis and overview. Some other chapters are case-studies rather than syntheses, and to my mind, this detracts from the value of the book for a reader in search of a solid primer covering the diversity of marine life. Unfortunately, much of the vast amount of information within the book is presented in a piecemeal fashion, somewhat huggemugger and with too many abrupt changes of tack. I also found some of the figures to be a bit confusing. Some seem to be presented out of context, others do not seem to depict what

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M. Jobling (✉)  
University of Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø, Norway  
e-mail: malcolm.jobling@uit.no

is claimed in the accompanying main text and several have legends that are not sufficiently explanatory. As a Parthian shot to this paragraph of general criticisms; I found it difficult to keep track of the abbreviations and acronyms that abound within the text of almost all of the chapters.

Over 100 authors have contributed to the writing of the book. All chapters are multi-author, with some of the chapters having over a dozen contributors; could this have led to a few cases of too many cooks spoiling the broth? There are 17 chapters, spread across 6 sections of unequal length; Oceans past (1 chapter), Oceans present—Geographic realms (10 chapters), Oceans present—Global distributions (2 chapters), Oceans present—Animal movements (2 chapters), Oceans future (1 chapter) and Using the data (1 chapter). Each chapter has its own list of references. There is an index, but no glossary of terms; many of the technical terms are not defined in the text, so contributing authors assume that their readers have more than just an elementary knowledge of marine biology, ecology and environmental sciences.

Some chapters are very much survey description and sampling orientated, whereas others concentrate more on the collation of findings from several projects. The chapter titles give little indication about the approach that the authors will adopt in their presentation. The chapters within the Geographic realms section encompass some that are broad in scope with coverage of, for example, coral reefs, seamounts, the deep sea and the polar regions. Here, some attempt is made to collate information from many projects. Other chapters are restricted to description of a narrow geographic area, such as the Gulf of Maine, with a more in-depth and compact coverage. The two chapters in the Global distributions section deal with marine microbes and zooplankton: Why only microbes and zooplankton? What about the phytoplankton and nekton, for example? I felt that the two chapters in the Animal movements section were a rather peculiar mix, and the title of chap. 16—The future of marine animal populations—led me to expect much more than was delivered. The title refers to a project within the Census of Marine Life, and the chapter describes the work carried out within this project rather than providing an overarching synthesis and summary. The closing chapter of the book is a bit of an olla-podrida that gives information about some databases and their development, their current content and potential for expansion and future use.

Given the amount of advanced publicity afforded to this book, I found it to be a bit of a disappointment; too much hyperbole from the publisher and too little honest-to-goodness sobriety. I wonder how many oceanographers, marine biologists and environmental scientists will be attracted to the book and will use it as a frequent source of reference. There is little in the book that can be used directly as material for teaching courses in marine biology and ecology, especially for undergraduate students, although some of the content could probably form the basis for seminars involving postgraduate students. Finally, few readers of this journal are likely to consider *Life in the World's Oceans* to be essential reading, and most will probably not agree with the claim of the publisher that this is a 'must have' volume that should adorn their bookshelves

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