

**CORAL REEFS, NATURE'S WONDERS**

WALT AND JEAN DEAS  
Published by Western Australian  
Museum / ISBN 1 920843 18 3

CORAL REEFS are spectacular ecosystems that support a myriad of life forms from algae to huge creatures like whale sharks. Visiting divers and snorkellers generally get hung up on the colourful fishlife found on coral reefs and take for granted the basic building blocks of the reef, the corals them-

selves. wife team Walt and Jean Deas were writing a book on coral reefs I hoped for something that would be more attractive to the diver who just wants to know what he or she is looking at. On the contents page each section is given a colour code that is reproduced on the edge of the pages which makes it easy to find a particular section of the book at a glance.

The first section is a foreword by David Bellamy and a preface by Jean-Michel Cousteau, impressive endorsements from

two of the world's leading conservationists.

This is understandable given the variety and sheer numbers of fish. There are plenty of fish guides available to the avid fish-watcher and even some dedicated to invertebrates. However there are precious few about corals themselves and most of them are academic tomes with detailed line drawings that may be fine for a marine biologist but for the general reader are a bit dull and technical.

So when I heard that husband and

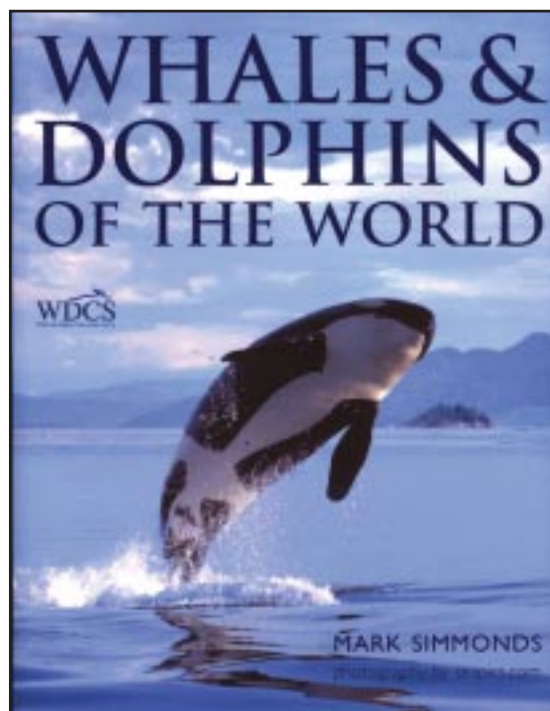
two of the world's leading conservationists.

In the introduction the authors give us a brief but wide ranging history of coral, covering not only the oldest known corals but also its significance and value throughout history. The authors also tell us in this section that "The main objective of this book is to nourish an awareness and appreciation of the natural world by describing, principally through photography, some of the prevalent features of one of the primary groups of living things - the corals".

Chapter one is more about the formation of reefs; the three different types of reef and how corals grow, feed and reproduce. This includes one of the clearest descriptions of how nematocysts inflict their poison into unwary prey, and careless divers who bump into fire coral.

This is a fascinating section full of surprises and one is immediately aware how much scientists are learning about corals and the delicate balance between them and single celled algae called zooxanthellae. Throughout this section there are fact boxes which focus on one particular variety or species like *Lophelia*.

Now you would not readily associate Norway with coral reefs but recent discoveries have revealed extensive cold water reef systems off Norway and west of St Kilda. This chapter concludes with an extensive review of the threats to the world's coral reefs. In fact they point out that we can learn



**WHALES & DOLPHINS OF THE WORLD**

Mark Simmonds  
New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd  
[www.newhollandpublishers.com](http://www.newhollandpublishers.com)  
£24.99  
ISBN 1-843306-21-2

PUBLISHED IN 2004 this book is a large format, glossy hardback written by Mark Simmonds. Mark is Director of Science at the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society ([www.wdcs.org](http://www.wdcs.org)) and has spent a good deal of time travelling the world to study the object of his passion. As a result this book is a mine of information liberally punctuated with beautiful photographs from Seapics.com.

The book starts with a monograph on each of the cetacean families including porpoises, dolphins, white whales, sperm whales and the great whales. Each monograph looks at specific species within the family with a general description of the individual, preferred habitat and migration routes (where appropriate).

from the way coral reefs are interdependent, "By using and re-using available resources, by extracting the maximum amounts of energy from them, animals with endosymbiotic photosynthesisers are able to survive in nutrient-poor environments, and some are able to grow very large. There is a lesson for our own extremely throwaway society - recycling works."

The next two chapters are the real meat of the book, a comprehensive catalogue of the world's corals. Every page has excellent photographs of the

different varieties of the species with details of the family, genus, common name, habitat and characteristics such as where they live, colour variations and any unusual features it may have.

The quality of the photography is what makes this book so good. The pictures are sharp and clear leaving the reader in no doubt what any particular coral should look like.

At the end of this chapter the authors look at measures being taken to try to re-generate coral reefs, and pose the question "is this the future?"

The last few chapters cover the photography and the pioneers of diving and those who inspired Walt and Jean to venture beneath the waves. There's even a mention for an organisation called The Scottish Sub-Aqua Club.

The coral code and a glossary of terms precede the index and a list of organisations dedicated to the protection of the underwater environment.

This book is obviously a labour of love for the authors - they have been in love with coral reefs since the day they first dived on one. Clearly

passionate about their subject one of the purposes of the book is to raise awareness of the threats, and the need to understand and protect these living communities.

A lifetime of dedicated photography and research into the subject has culminated in an excellent book that is more than just an ID guide to corals.

If you want to know more about it then this is the book for you, I cannot recommend it enough, it is a must for the diver who cares about the underwater environment.

**Jack Morrison**



#### Images

Far left: Jean Deas examines a *dendronephthya* in a crevice at Sanganeb Reef - Red Sea

Left: *Dendrophyllia gracilis* (common name - golden coral/orange coral)

A section on life histories and strategies for survival describes the basic biology of cetaceans the similarities and differences between species; for example the feeding habits of grazers and hunters, how the animals create and use echolocation clicks and the importance of communication within groups.

Interaction between humans and cetaceans is a separate chapter. Throughout history there are uplifting stories of dolphins coming to the rescue of drowning sailors or swimmers under attack from sharks and the author discusses some of the reasons for this behaviour.

Stories of humans and cetaceans working together make fascinating reading but sadly these are the exception rather than the rule. The main threat to cetaceans is human activity and we have unwittingly put them under siege from all

angles. The threat of whaling has declined over the past few decades but some nations persist in hunting whales for "scientific purposes". In addition to these dangers more enlightened countries, including our own, continue to threaten whales, dolphins and porpoises through destruction of habitat, over fishing of prey species, by-catch in industrial fisheries, global warming and pollution of the seas with chemicals, plastics and noise. This rather depressing chapter is followed by a more upbeat section on conservation.

Since the reduction in whaling many species which were teetering on the brink of extinction are slowly recovering thanks to efforts of conservationists around the world. The reader is left in no doubt of the urgent need to learn more about cetaceans and to provide and

maintain marine protected areas where they can live, feed and breed without interruption.

*Whales & Dolphins of the*

*World* took a while to read, not because the text is difficult but because the pictures are so beautiful the eye is drawn to them. Nevertheless the text is a match for the photographs and this book has a great deal to say about the past, present and future of these marvellous creatures.

This book will give a great deal of pleasure to anyone with an interest in one, or more, of the 80

species of cetaceans that inhabit our oceans and rivers.

**Alison Fish**

