

Ocean

Reviewer: Jack Morrison

Innumerable facts that is.

'Ocean' is the definitive guide to all things underwater. It is richly illustrated and thoughtfully laid out and it presents information in a way that makes you just want to learn more. Suitable for anyone with an inquiring mind from 8 to 80 ...

QUITE A few years ago at a branch annual dinner dance someone asked Adam Curtis, who at the time was professor of cell biology, why the sea was salty? After a few moments thought he rather dryly answered: "Because it tastes better".

If the questioner had a copy of Dorling Kindersley blockbuster 'Ocean' they would be able to turn to page 37 where there is an explanation of salinity and why the sea tastes salty, how and why the level varies throughout the world's oceans, just one of the fascinating facts to be found in this comprehensive book.

'Ocean' is the latest in a series from Dorling Kindersley which includes Earth, Human, Animal and Universe. More an encyclopaedia than a mere book it covers every conceivable aspect of the ocean and does it very well.

The book is divided into four chapters. An overview of the physical and chemical features of the ocean is given in the introduction; ocean environments looks at the main zones of the ocean; ocean life examines the life forms that inhabit them; while the atlas of the oceans contains detailed maps of the oceans.

Each chapter is divided into smaller sections for instance in the introduction the first section covers the properties of the water molecule, the chemistry of seawater and the way temperature pressure and light transmission change with depth. There are sections on ocean circulation, ocean winds, climate including hurricanes and typhoons with a section devoted to hurricane Katrina

and a spectacular aerial photo of the flooded City of New Orleans. I rather like the way this book uses well known events like this to illustrate the serious points.

For instance in the next chapter, ocean environments, there is a section on icebergs and what better way to illustrate the dangers of icebergs than through the story of the Titanic. No book about the sea or the oceans would be complete without a reference to the most famous wreck in the world.

The third and largest chapter and probably the one that holds the most interest for divers is Ocean Life. This begins with an explanation of the classification system for all forms of life including the history of how the classification system developed.

This is the biggest chapter and again is divided into two main sections. The first is an introduction to ocean life and covers creatures that spend their life drifting through the ocean to things that live on the seabed. Here you will find those strange creatures that live in the abyss some of which can produce their own light in an environment where no natural light ever penetrates.

The second section is called Kingdoms of Ocean Life and starts with bacteria and archaea. I have to admit I have never heard of archaea but I now know they are related to bacteria but have enough fundamental differences to be considered a distinct evolutionary branch of life.

From these we move on to the Protist of which there are more than 100,000 species. Protists are microscopic organ-

isms which form a major part of the plankton and play a crucial role in the marine food chain providing energy to all other animals in the ocean.

The rest of this chapter climbs through the higher forms of life till we reach the mammals including birds and all your favourite fish from anemone fish to dolphins, sharks and whales.

The last chapter is for those of us who love looking at maps. Here you will find evidence of who did most of the exploration and discovery of the shape of the undersea topography. Looking at the area between South Georgia, the Falklands and Antarctica it is called the Scotia Sea with prominent features like the South Shetland Trough, the Orkney deep and lots more with Scottish connections.

Relief maps show all the deep trenches, ridges and seamounts around the world. Finally there is a glossary of terms, a general index and an index dedicated to the atlas.

This is a huge subject and the publishers have given it a huge book. Of course such a vast subject cannot be dealt with in too great detail but it is remarkable just how much depth they have gone into, (oh no I promised myself when I started this I would not use the word depth to describe it and there I've just done it, sorry, but we need a few puns occasionally for the groan factor).

By now you will have gathered I really enjoyed this book it's the kind of book you can delve into anywhere and find something interesting. As a general reference book on everything to do with the ocean it succeeds in many ways.

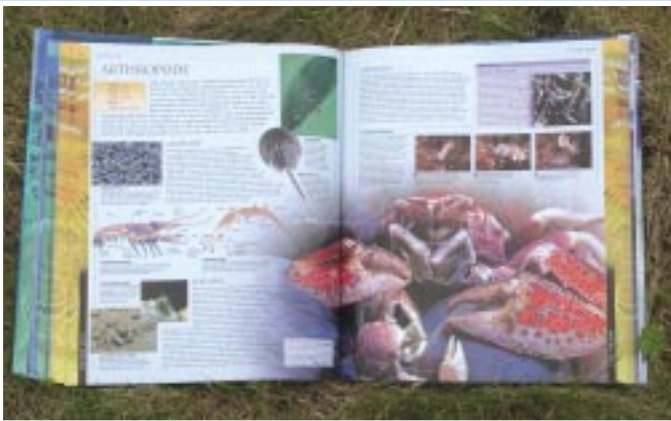
's Innumerable



Animal life spread



Beaches and dunes



Astropods



Plant life

Dorling Kindersley is renowned for publishing books aimed at children and this book follows their tried and tested format but it is not written with children in mind although the language is designed to appeal to anyone with an interest in the world's oceans, what lives in them and around them, how they were formed and what they are made of.

Throughout the book the photographs and illustrations are superb. The editors have used pictures from the best photographers in the world and you only have to look at the two pages of acknowledgements to see the breadth of photographic talent used.

I have several books produced by National Geographic who are considered the leading publishers of this type of book; however I found this much better than anything they have produced. Their books tend to rely on the strength of their photographers and the text is usually poor. However DK have used excellent photographs and clear interesting illustrations.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough, at £30 it is not cheap but it is worth it if you want a comprehensive encyclopaedia of the ocean.



Reptiles



Zones of the ocean

Ocean

Dorling Kindersley

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