BOOK REVIEWS


This book is a wonderful and fascinating combination of the unofficial history of fishery biology, a scathing and politically-incorrect condemnation of aquaculture and government agencies, and the biology of fishes found in fresh water as observed and/or conducted by an outstanding fishery biologist. The major argument or theme throughout the text is the status of the origin, evolution, and development of the freshwater fish fauna in Trinidad. Unfortunately, these diverse elements are mixed together in a hodgepodge that may frustrate most readers and only the status of the freshwater fish fauna is properly developed and reasonably complete. The author very briefly highlights the study of freshwater fishes in Trinidad, but unfortunately does not include enough background information for the general reader to appreciate or completely understand the synopsis. The book is rambling, somewhat disorganized and sometimes redundant. This appears to be the author’s intentionally irreverent rebellion against the scientific orderliness that previously ruled his life.

The author is a renaissance man who works not only on freshwater fishes but also on amphibians, orchids, coral reefs and marine biology, and has published scientific articles in all of these diverse fields. He obviously had a lot of fun writing this book and this joy and enthusiasm spills over to be shared with the reader.

The book contains one color (cover) and 36 black-and-white photographs, 58 maps, 2 tables, 73 citations, and 106 pages. One hundred and seven fish species are mentioned, but only 48 of these are freshwater fishes from Trinidad, and of these, only 42 are extant. The Table of Contents is brief and tidy, but needed more subdivisions to provide adequate information. The main divisions of the text are: “Places and Faces” (85 pages of introduction and reminiscences); “Farms and Fishes” (7.2 pages of aquaculture condemnation); “Barriers and Bridges” (11.4 pages developing the argument about the origin of Trinidadian freshwater fishes including coral reef data suggesting the age when the continental connection ended); “House Cleaning the List” (9 pages of excellent general information correcting and amending the fish list of Boeseman (1960, 1964)); “Homes and Ranges” (11.3 pages of very useful distribution and basic biology data which is also important in developing the main argument of the book); “Feeding and Breeding” (4.7 pages about fish food habits and reproduction summarized largely by families, but would have been more valuable if individual species had been discussed); “Views from the Bridge” (9 pages characterizing the freshwater fish fauna, further developing the origin argument, and suggesting future research); and “Post Script” (1.3 pages adding radiocarbon dating of two reef corals which support “the argument”). The Bibliography does an outstanding job of including obscure reports and academic theses on local fishes, but the author admits its incompleteness by excluding all of the early literature included in Boeseman (1960, 1964) and all those “unimportant to the spirit of this memoir”, thus leaving most readers with an intense “homework assignment”. The “Identifying the Trinidad Freshwater Fish” section (1 page) is incomplete and essentially defaults to Boeseman (1960) and the fish photographs included in the text. The fish pictures are pleasing aquarium shots, but not large or distinct enough for diagnostic purposes. The Indexes are sufficient, but could have been more complete and detailed.

This book acknowledges four reviewers, yet remains riddled with many typographical and factual errors. The word “extinct” is overused and occasionally misused throughout the text. The correct word for local extinction when the species still exists elsewhere is “extirpation”. The writing is friendly and informal, but the use of scientific names detracts from this popular format. Throughout the text an inconsistent mixture of scientific, genus and common names is used, often confusing the reader. In the extreme example, “One of these was the channel catfish, Ictalurus nebulosus, a species widely cultured in the southern United States.”, the names “channel catfish, Ictalurus nebulosus” are used to refer to a single fish species but actually designate two different species. Ictalurus nebulosus [= Amietius nebulosus] is the brown bullhead, not the
channel catfish, *Ictalurus punctatus*. Also contrary to the text, channel catfish can be bred in the tropics and do well in tropical culture ponds.

We work almost every day with government biologists and aquaculturalists on Caribbean islands. These people are asked to do miracles in environmentally-hostile situations often without adequate salaries, support, equipment and/or supplies; and are caught between a biologically under-educated public and biologically unreasonable administrators. This text may be a bit harsh on them, nevertheless, the interesting political and biological tidbits make this text rewarding and entertaining reading. The behind-the-scenes insights record vital and intriguing parts of history that would have been otherwise forgotten or smothered by official dogma.

If the reader works hard enough to extract and resemble the main argument of the book, the rewards lessen. The author’s analysis of how the freshwater fish fauna of Trinidad originated, evolved and developed is largely unsupported, if interesting, supposition. The analysis does provide incentives and direction for future research.

All scientists have an obligation to society to leave a memoir encompassing the details of their unpublished research, insights, and accumulated wisdom. This is an outstanding, interesting and useful memoir, but it would have been more educational if it had been expanded to include more of these otherwise unobtainable details. The scientific community owes the author a debt for this synopsis of fishery-biology research in Trinidad.

At $15.00 US for the book and $5.00 postage and handling (from Julian S. Kenny, 26 Valley View Drive, Maracas, St. Joseph, Trinidad and Tobago) this text is a bargain. It is a “must read” for all fishery biologists, aquarists, and fish fanciers.

**LITERATURE CITED**


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