

This is not a traditional natural history book, and if you are looking for a definitive book on killer whale biology or ecology, this one may not be the most obvious choice. But that is intentional. Whilst *The Killer Whale Journals* is, of course, a book about killer whales, it is also a book about killer whale research, and about the relationships between people and this fascinating species. In examining the latter, Strager takes us around the world, highlighting the killer whales of Norway as well as Iceland, Greenland, Russia, Australia, Gibraltar and, of course, the Pacific Northwest. The chosen case studies cover the full range of human-whale relationships, from collaborations to persecution, from fear and mistrust to near-reverence. Strager takes us along on her personal journey as she forges her own research career, but also guides us on a historical journey as whale-watching and ecotourism emerge in areas where people were previously more likely to persecute the local killer whales than take visitors to watch them. Although *The Killer Whale Journals* is not a book about killer whale ecology per se, it does include some wonderful, detailed descriptions of behaviours observed by the author or her collaborators in the field. It also includes some unusual anecdotes, such as the 'whales in the potato field' (pp. 127–140), which you are unlikely to come across elsewhere. Some of these descriptions can be uncomfortable to read, detailing persecutions and overfishing, and describing the consequences of ecological misconceptions that leave the reader reflecting once again on the apparent inability of humans to learn oft-repeated lessons from nature.

Refreshingly, the book covers little about captive killer whales. It would be difficult to avoid this topic altogether, but aside from a discussion of the notorious Russian 'whale jail' (pp. 158–175), captivity receives only a passing mention. Instead, this book tells of the birth of killer whale research, of the scientists who pioneered techniques still familiar to those of us working with wild cetaceans today. The book is populated with interactions and interviews with other killer whale researchers, and you can feel the joy Strager derives from these collaborations as she describes the visits made to many of their study sites. These are the parts of the book that feel like wonderful pieces of travel writing; Strager is clearly a person who deeply loves spending time on or by the ocean. I found the descriptions of the Green Cape, the site of the Far East Russian Orca Project in the Avacha Gulf, particularly engrossing.

The Killer Whale Journals is a fast-paced tour of killer whales and the people who live and work with them. You will almost certainly

learn something from this book, even if it's not what you expected to learn about. It will be particularly enjoyable to anyone who enjoys travel writing, the history of research, good storytelling, nautical yarns or captivating encounters with the wonders of the natural world.

CLAIRE LACEY (✉, clacey2@hawaii.edu) Marine Mammal Research Program, Kane'ohe, Hawaii, USA

Why Sharks Matter: A Deep Dive with the World's Most Misunderstood Predator by David Shiffman (2022) 285 pp., Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA. ISBN 978-1-4214-4364-5 (hbk), USD 24.95.

'But aren't you scared of sharks?' This was one of the first questions friends and family asked when I announced I would be moving to Australia. But as someone who works in wildlife conservation and is fond of being underwater, I have never understood this omnipresent fear of sharks. I have been fortunate to dive with beautiful shark species, and revel in knowing how important these predators are for our oceans. A healthy dose of respect is vital for safe encounters with these wild animals, but apart from a select few large species, fear of being bitten by a shark never factors into the equation when I get in the water.

This is a sentiment I know many other marine conservationists share, including David Shiffman, the author of *Why Sharks Matter*. Having dedicated his career to studying and advocating for the protection of sharks, Shiffman is no stranger to the plethora of cultural, political and socio-economic issues and contentions that surround the conservation of this diverse group of fish. In this book, he delves into dispelling myths spawned by misinformation or the use of inflammatory language that often characterizes media reports of shark bite incidents, pointing out how sharks have been vilified and misunderstood all along.

In the chapter *Sharks Are Not a Threat to Humans* Shiffman argues 'that humans are better off with healthy shark populations than we are without sharks in our waters, and that the benefits of having sharks around outweigh the costs' (p. 23). He highlights the importance of changing the narrative and the language we use when talking about sharks, such as saying 'shark bite' instead of the more sinister 'shark attack' and avoiding the use of 'shark infested waters', which 'suggests that there's something wrong or bad about sharks being there' (p. 30). He goes on to point out that widespread fear of sharks and people's 'nonchalance about the

fate of sharks has resulted in political marginalization of shark conservation and management efforts' (p. 43). Explaining that sharks are not generally dangerous to humans is the first step in convincing people of the need for their conservation. But Shiffman takes his argument one step further, saying that 'simply acknowledging that these animals are not bad is less powerful than understanding that they're actively good, and that bad things happen without them' (p. 61).

At just over 250 pages, *Why Sharks Matter* provides a great introductory overview to all things shark, while not feeling like a science-heavy textbook. Although it opens by explaining all the reasons sharks matter ecologically, much of the book is dedicated to exploring the challenges surrounding the conservation and protection of these maligned and misunderstood predators. The author does not shy away from discussing the contradicting and sometimes controversial policies that exist in this field, or the intricacies of the international management of species and fisheries. Over the course of several chapters, Shiffman discusses the benefits and drawbacks of existing methods for protecting shark populations, such as the differences between target- vs limit-based policies. Although also covering topics from an international perspective, many of the examples provided are US-centric, which is unsurprising given that this is where the author has done extensive work and research.

Why Sharks Matter includes 16 colour plates that help illustrate many of the species and themes discussed. The book is well-referenced, with evidence and articles provided to support the author's arguments. Scientific concepts are presented in a straightforward and simple way, often with a colloquial tone, which makes the content less technical and more accessible to a broad audience. Shiffman interlaces serious conservation issues with popular culture and media references, and the text is peppered throughout with a good dose of humour, personal anecdotes and lessons learnt.

In the chapter *How Are Scientists Helping Sharks?* we hear first-hand from the people working across a wide range of shark-related research. From those working on tracking and behaviour to those trying to age sharks or understand what role wildlife tourism has to play in shark conservation, these vignettes are a great way for readers to get a glimpse of the diverse opportunities and disciplines in this field. I was especially delighted to see so many inspiring women highlighted, as well as Minorities in Shark Sciences, a group that is improving representation, diversity, and inclusion in shark conservation. The book closes with a description of several notable shark organizations working around

the world and points out ways readers can help and get involved, whether by donating or volunteering.

As Shiffman says so poignantly, ‘there’s an incredibly diverse group of animals older than the rings of Saturn, capable of countless amazing behaviours, critically important to the health of an ecosystem that billions of humans depend on for food, and in serious conservation trouble’ (p. 25). *Why Sharks Matter* is ideal for those wanting to get to know sharks better, debunk some myths, gain a deeper understanding of the political and socio-economic challenges surrounding shark conservation, and hear directly from dedicated individuals who are working every day to ensure sharks are protected.

EMMA MUENCH (✉, emma.muench@gmail.com) Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Brisbane, Australia

The Cactus Hunters: Desire and Extinction in the Illicit Succulent Trade by

Jared D. Margulies (2023) 392 pp., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA. ISBN 978-1-5179-1399-1 (pbk), USD 24.95.

Given that plants are chronically overlooked in wildlife trade research, and broader conservation efforts in general, I love seeing new flora-centric publications and was thrilled to be invited to review Jared D. Margulies’ *The Cactus Hunters*. Succulents are ideal focal species within the botanical world because of their ‘comparatively charming nature’ (p. 168). It is ironic, however, that the charisma that makes succulents such excellent flagship taxa, enticing readers to enter the subject of plant conservation, is the same reason that the book is necessary in the first place. Succulents are so alluring that many species are highly threatened by the insatiable appetite of plant hunters who gather specimens from the wild for private collections. Cacti are one of the most threatened taxonomic groups in part because of this.

The cover art, exemplifying how charming a succulent can be, features a small cactus with beautiful multicoloured flowers nearly as large as the rest of the plant. The small detail of a dashed line around the illustration suggests the image is about to be cut-and-pasted into a different location, just as wild individuals too often are. Based on the back-cover blurb, I was expecting the book to be a narrative travel story in which the author follows in the footsteps of highly trafficked succulents, encountering players in the illicit trade along the way. However, it was apparent from the introduction that it is more than that. The book does deliver a fascinating account of the author’s first-hand experience with some of the most threatened succulent species and those who aim to either collect or protect them, but it also engages with a wide range of theory and analysis.

Even those highly versed in plant conservation can learn something from this book: it draws on gender theory, psychoanalysis, colonial histories, racial stereotyping, capitalist consumerism and political ecology to provide new and important insights into the trade of succulents. *The Cactus Hunters* is organized into eight broad chapters, which are in turn subdivided into short subsections of only a few pages each. This format helps to break up complex analyses into more easily digestible ideas. I really enjoyed this unique method of storytelling woven with academic theory. Margulies does an excellent job convincing the reader of the inherent and almost intoxicating allure of succulents for collectors. Reading about the diversity of stakeholders that he interacted with is fascinating and provides a well-rounded collection of perspectives on which the reader can draw their own conclusions as to what should be acceptable in the international succulent trade.

As much as I enjoyed the book as a conservationist, I think the author misses a few marks. The text is complex and has numerous valuable expert insights, which makes it jargon-heavy and dense in places. This may make it less appealing to readers with less

technical and specialized interests. Furthermore, although the problem of succulent trade is detailed, there is a distinct lack of recommendations for actions that everyday consumers could take in response. For me, the most engaging parts of the book are the descriptions of the author’s personal interactions with succulents or with collectors or conservationists involved with them. I found these anecdotes, although few, extremely captivating, and those passages will stay with me longer than much of the psychoanalysis. The book’s focus on complex theory may bias its readership towards the academic, limiting its potential impact among a broader audience. I also feel that the images in the book fail to capture the fascinating descriptions in the text. Given Margulies’ extensive efforts to convince the reader of how special many of these plants are, going so far as describing one species as ‘so exceptional in color and form that they felt ethereal and otherworldly’ (p. 178), the included photographs do not quite do them justice. Margulies highlights photography as vital to many hobbyist succulent collectors, so I had hoped for beautiful, colourful images. However, and rather disappointingly, the book contains only black-and-white photographs. I thus often set the book aside to look online for pictures of the species being described, which helped overcome this issue but made the book feel less complete.

Overall, I found *The Cactus Hunters* an interdisciplinary read that unveiled the varied motivations and desires behind the illegal succulent trade. Despite the intricacies and complexities of the book, I would certainly recommend it to anyone looking to learn about the plight of threatened flora and what motivates the overconsumption of some of our most beloved plants. I, for one, now have a much deeper understanding of this surprisingly widespread trade.

RAINIE SCHULTE (✉, rainie.schulte@fauna-flora.org) Fauna & Flora, Cambridge, UK