

This is a very well written book, a pleasure to read. It may indeed be a feature of those who have spent many months or years in the world's lonely places that they have, through an appreciation of things non-human, an honest and open way of expressing themselves that cannot be obtained in the laboratory or the busy worlds most of us inhabit.

V. REYNOLDS

Biotopes of the Western Arabian Gulf, by **Philip W. Basson, John E. Burchard jnr and John T. Hardy**. Aramco, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia*

A Guide to the Common Reef Fishes of the Western Indian Ocean, by **K. Brick**. Macmillan, £2.95.

It is not often that one encounters a scientific work masquerading as a coffee-table book. This is indeed a lavish production and one that would have been impossible, on cost grounds, for a scientific book publisher to produce. For that alone, we must be grateful to Aramco. Within the 284 pages, there are 189 figures, the great majority in well reproduced colour.

The first section 'organisms and environment' deals simply with various aspects of ecology, relevant to the scope of the book, defines the various terms used, and gives a short account of the physical environment of the region. The bulk of the book consists of a detailed survey of the various biotopes. Intertidal biotopes are discussed under two headings (exposed coastal beaches and tidal flats); subtidal biotopes under four headings (hard and soft bottoms, grassbeds, coral reefs and islands, and artificial structures); water column biotopes are divided into plankton, nekton and hypersaline environments. All the taxa from whales and birds to algae are duly considered.

The last section contains the glossary, a reasonably comprehensive bibliography and species lists for each biotope. The index is good, although it is here, perhaps, that the first omission becomes obvious: there is only one entry for pollution, and that refers to DDT; oil pollution is not mentioned. It would be interesting, and indeed important, to know whether the area selected for study has escaped oil pollution and if so, how?

The Indian Ocean guide starts with a useful map, showing the currents and some of the localities mentioned in the text. The preface is honest. The author explains his motives in compiling this layman's book and praises more academic source books. Parenthetically, it may be noted that his enthusiastic approach is enhanced by his inability to spell ichthyological.

The first three chapters are good simple explanations of the background to the existence of the coral reef fisheries, dealing with the hydrology of the region, the nature of corals and the structure and formation of the reefs. In particular I should like to praise his succinct account of the interactions between mankind, the reefs and the crown of thorns starfish. There are mistakes, however, some of them serious. The grey mullets are placed in the Mullidae although in the text they are correctly referred to the Mugilidae, but the most heinous crime, to those of a taxonomic persuasion, occurs in chapter 4 where he dates binomial nomenclature from Linnaeus 1735 whereas all other zoologists date it from 1758. Chapter 5 discusses the biological importance of the various types of colour patterns observed in reef fishes.

The major part of the book is devoted to descriptions of the reef fishes, which seem adequate for identification. The drawings are not especially accurate, there are discrepancies between e.g. the number of scales drawn and the number present according to the text. However, in compensation, there is a large number of colour photographs.

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* Not available in bookshops; interested specialists should write to Aramco, Engineering Dept., Laan van Meerdevoort, 55 The Hague, Netherlands.