Lin Baldock and Frances Dipper are the authors of this fascinating field guide *Inshore Fishes of Britain and Ireland*. Lin Baldock is a biologist studying both freshwater and marine biology and a qualified, experienced commercial diver. Having been diving for over forty years with over four thousand dives as shown by her logbooks, Baldock has been recording a wide variety of marine life in all British and Irish seawaters. Frances Dipper is a marine biologist and writer on marine conservation and has dived extensively in the United Kingdom, the Middle East, and the Far East. Although no longer engaged in scuba diving, Dipper still collaborates with the Porcupine Marine Natural History Society (PMNHS) and Seasearch to record marine species along the coastline of the United Kingdom. *Inshore Fishes of Britain and Ireland* is the latest book in the book series Seasearch Field Guides, which aims to help divers and snorkelers identify marine species during underwater expeditions.[1] With expertise in chemistry and marine sciences, Charlotte Bolton has been the editor of this book series and the national Seasearch coordinator since 2016.

*Inshore Fishes of Britain and Ireland* focuses on 157 marine species living in the sea waters surrounding Britain and Ireland, which are likely to be seen by divers, snorkelers, and shore walkers. The book is organized according to the locations where humans are likely to observe the fishes, with most species grouped according to their habitat, from open water to the seabed. For each marine species, the authors provide the following textual information: scientific and vernacular names, the surname of the person who gave the scientific name and year of publication, a general description, key features, and similar species. Meanwhile, the authors utilize illustrations to present the habitats, depth range, size of the marine life, and traffic-light identification confidence icons indicating the difficulty levels of identifying the species. For each species, at least one photograph is provided to illustrate the species in its natural habitat. The photographer's name appears in the
The book is notable for its exceptional qualities in the following five aspects. In the aspect of structure, this book is organized according to a largely spatial order, from open water to seabed. The focus is on the habitats of the marine species where divers and snorkelers can record them with the use of cameras and without the need for other sophisticated technologies. This explicit structure is user-friendly to readers without expertise in majors like marine ecology and marine biology. In addition, Baldock and Dipper also provide a taxonomic list of marine fishes covered by this guide, which follows the class–order–family–species order (pp. 280-281). This facilitates the reading of readers interested in the academic aspect of these marine creatures. In a word, this field guide caters to the needs of readers either with or without professional knowledge of marine fishes and marine environments.

In the aspect of presentation, the concise textual descriptions of each marine species are well supported by photos, illustrations, and sometimes tables. The illustrations for each species contain four sets of representations, conveying information to readers efficiently. The first set of representations shows the habitats of marine species, including bedrock and boulders, wreckage, sand and gravel, in water column (pelagic), close to the seabed (benthopelagic), and on or in the seabed (benthic). The places where divers and snorkelers are likely to encounter them are highlighted with orange color. The second set of representations comprises eight types, ranging from the representation of the thumb to that of the entire human body, enabling divers and snorkelers to use their bodies to estimate the size of marine life. The third set of representations comprises three traffic-light identification confidence icons, indicating the levels of difficulty in identifying marine species. Green indicates the species is easily identifiable by sight. Yellow means it can often be identified with a close look or photo. Red denotes that identification is difficult, requiring photos and expert advice. The fourth set of representations indicates three depth ranges: lower shore and shallow water (0-10m), mid-depth (10-25m), and deep water (more than 25m). Overall, this book employs an effective combination of textual and visual information to present details efficiently and accurately.

In terms of identifying marine species, this book generally considers the following features of a marine species: the size and shape of the fish as a whole; the color, number, location, and shape of the dorsal, caudal, pelvic, and pectoral fins; the colors and lateral lines on the surface; the shape of the head; the shapes and locations of the nostril and mouth; the color and shape of the eyes; the abundance and distribution; similar species; habitats; and levels of difficulty of identification. For the species that cannot be identified solely based on direct observation with eyes, the authors propose the use of images, videos, and databases such as the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS) to confirm the confusing species.[2] This general pattern can be helpful for readers to identify marine fish in their daily lives or their research.

Although there is a general pattern that can be used to identify marine fish species primarily based on appearance and habitats, there is still a possibility of obtaining a false identification result. Baldock and Dipper figure out several potential identification pitfalls, particularly their fins and barbels, color variations, color change and camouflage. For example, many codfishes and...
seabreams are camouflaged by “countershading” (p. 59). In addition, the sex of marine species can change due to some factors, making it more challenging to identify marine species. For instance, female and male cuckoo wrasse (Labrus mixtus) have distinct colors and markings on their surface, and the cuckoo wrasse can change its sex during its life cycle. Furthermore, divers and snorkelers may encounter marine species in an unexpected area that does not align with the geographical range and habitat described in this field guide. Nevertheless, it is always possible to see a fish in an unexpected location. In such a situation, divers and snorkelers are not obliged to adhere to this field guide entirely and may instead adjust their judgments according to real situations. Therefore, it is advisable to take potential factors into account when undertaking diving or snorkeling, though this field guide has provided nearly all the basic information about how to identify marine species.

From an epistemological and methodological perspective, this book offers invaluable insights for studies on marine life in historical times, encouraging scholars, particularly environmental historians, to reflect on the primary sources they have been using for a long time. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this book is the authors’ emphasis on the use of firsthand photographs of living marine life in their natural habitats. Historically many naturalists applied remote sampling methods to collect marine species specimens from seawaters, including “netting, dredging, trawling, and explosives” (p. 11), as the authors point out. Considering descriptions of dead marine life in historical texts and natural museums differ from those of their living counterparts, the discrepancy between descriptions of dead and living marine life can lead to different analyses and conclusions in research like environmental history studies.

This further offers environmental historians an opportunity to reflect on the three major types of primary sources regarding marine life in British and Irish waters: specimens of dead marine life held by natural museums, living marine life exhibited in aquariums, and living marine life in their natural habitats. These three types of primary sources regarding marine life can lead to different narratives of the same subject. Additionally, the underlying philosophies between these three types of sources differ.

The first two types are anthropocentric to a degree, as they rely on human expectations to process the dead marine life or to display the living marine life in a man-made environment by neglecting the agency of these living beings. In these two circumstances, there is a higher chance that the descriptions of marine life could be different from those based on the living creatures in their natural habitats. On the contrary, the third type of primary source, which is adopted by this book and embraced by the Seasearch project, can often provide the most accurate description of these living creatures. It cares about the agency of animals and thus has an animal-centric focus. Baldock and Dipper emphasize that when photographing or taking video of marine life, divers and snorkelers should align with the Seasearch philosophy of “look but don’t touch” to minimize disturbance to marine fish and marine environments.[3] In other words, this book recognizes the welfare of marine fish and advocates the idea of leaving nature untouched, which is an important part of contemporary environmentalism. This book represents a departure from anthropocentrism and an endorsement of the conservation of marine life and their natural habitats from human influences to the greatest extent possible. It thus offers an opportunity for readers to reflect on the relationship between humans and marine ecosystems.

Therefore, in the epistemological and methodological aspects, this book encourages environmental historians to conduct a cross-check between these three types of primary sources regarding marine life wherever possible. This is to generate more convincing, comprehensive, pro-
found, and nuanced conclusions, similar to the way in which they cross-check different historical records regarding the same subject matter. Besides, photographic and video documentation can serve to supplement the textual records of marine life. The visual arts can display aspects that are not present in the textual records, and vice versa, especially in historical studies on living marine life in recent decades.

Finally, this book makes a significant contribution to the conservation of marine life and marine environments in the British and Irish waters. After mapping the marine fishes in this region, Baldock and Dipper express concerns about the health of marine species and marine ecosystems. They provide a concise overview of the parasites of fish, including crustaceans, black-spot diseases, and leeches, to see their impact on the health of some marine species. Moreover, Baldock and Dipper present the legal protection and conservation status of these marine species, Seasearch surveying and recording, biosecurity, and non-native species in the British Isles. This encourages readers to become more aware of the importance of marine ecosystem health and to learn more about the conservation of this ecosystem, particularly the marine fish in this region.

Overall, this book is an excellent sourcebook with a great many of the latest firsthand materials. Information provided by this book, along with the data uploaded by the volunteer divers supported by the Seasearch project, will contribute significantly to the studies on marine life and marine ecosystems in British and Irish waters. Also, this book will undoubtedly contribute a lot to the conservation of marine species and marine environments in the contexts of the UN Decade of Ocean (2021-30) and climate change in our era.

Notes


[2]. World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS), accessed May 22, 2024, https://www.marinespecies.org. More sources can be found in the “Where to find out more” section in Inshore Fishes of Britain and Ireland (pp. 276-77).

[3]. To adhere to this philosophy, divers and snorkelers sometimes use remote systems like the baited remote underwater video (BRUV) system to take photographs and video of marine life. Furthermore, such remote systems can operate underwater for a longer duration than humans can remain in the underwater environment (p. 23).

[4]. The volunteer divers have been collecting and uploading data on marine fishes and their habitats. These data are available at https://www.seasearch.org.uk/report (accessed May 23, 2024).
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment


**URL:** https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=59970

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.