

Book Reviews

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**Tropical Estuarine Fishes: Ecology,
Exploitation and Conservation**

By Stephen J. M. Blaber

Fish and Aquatic Resources Series 7 (series ed. T.J. Pitcher). Blackwell Science Ltd, Oxford, 2000. ISBN 0-632-05655-X, £79.50. Hard cover, pp. xii + 372, 35 tables, 83 figures. Extensive list of references; taxonomic, geographical and subject indexes.

One question that should be asked more often is 'What becomes of the flood of intermixed facts, factoids, and gems in the thousands of papers – many of them "just publishable units" – on the food and feeding, distribution and migration, and growth and reproduction of fish one finds scattered in an ever-growing number of journals?'. It is clear that only a large asteroid impact could stem this flood; too many theses have to be written, and too many academic promotion committees count papers for this to happen.

Fortunately, there are ways to make sense of this flood, and to channel the evidence it carries toward deeper insights and knowledge on the ecosystems in which the fish in question live. One of these solutions is to write books such as Blaber's excellent *Tropical Estuarine Fishes*, whose key chapters on the 'diversity of tropical estuaries'; their 'fish faunas and communities'; their 'trophic ecology', 'reproductive strategies'; 'effect of structure on hydrology'; 'mangrove or estuarine dependence', and human impacts (fishing, agriculture, industry, climate change) use a formidable amount of evidence to buttress the key thesis that tropical estuaries are distinct and highly productive, but also rather fragile ecosystems.

The book, thus assembled, also shows one important aspect of what we should do when studying biodiversity – something we talk about a lot, but rarely engage in. Analysing and reporting on patterns of biodiversity is what Blaber has done here, all quite masterly. In the process, he has also shown how, in a

given set of ecosystems, different species, while doing their own thing, have ended up constructing systems of mutual dependence, with each contributing its bit to something that is far more than the sum of its parts – just like this book. Analysing biodiversity thus begat understanding of ecosystem functioning, which then begat a well-rounded book. Now to the guidelines given to book reviewers:

- Yes, the material is extremely well selected and organised.
- Yes, the arguments are clear and logical, and the statements of facts are accurate.
- Yes, the book is sturdy and well bound, and its many figures, mainly drawn by Stella Barber (let's give credit where credit is due) are clear and convey their message very well.
- The readership: any student or scientist working on tropical estuarine (and coastal) fishes must have this book.

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