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BOOK REVIEW

Sharks and Rays of Australia

Second Edition (2009); Hardback, 656 pages
P. R. Last and J. D. Stevens, eds
CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood
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THE first edition of *Sharks and Rays of Australia* was published in 1994. This second edition is fully revised, with descriptions of 322 species of sharks, skates, rays, and chimaerids. Since 1994, the Class Chondrichthyes has been extensively revised and the second edition of *Sharks and Rays of Australia* includes 26 species that have been formally described since the first edition, with formal classification of 97 species that were previously given temporary names. Names of other species have also been revised in light of new knowledge of the systematics within this important group of fish.

Sharks and Rays of Australia is superbly illustrated in full colour, with clear, easy-to-follow keys and sufficient detail for each to species that identification by non-ichthyologists should be relatively straightforward. I experienced no difficulties in using the keys and illustrations to “identify” the species of sharks and rays I encounter while fishing and exploring the Hawkesbury River north of Sydney. There are several features to this book that make it especially easy to use (or even just to enjoy the diversity of sharks and rays found in Australian waters). Each species is illustrated and the species account highlights key identifying features, the keys themselves are fully illustrated with arrows indicating important distinguishing characteristics, and, best of all, the book concludes with a full set of 91 colour plates of closely related species shown together. Each illustration on the plates identifies whether the individual shown is a male, female or juvenile. For some, as with the Saddled Swellshark *Cephaloscyllium*

variegatum, male, female, and juvenile are all illustrated. Interestingly, for this species, male/female differences are not mentioned in the species account, although it is indicated that the juveniles are differently coloured from the adults. Also, males, females, and juveniles are not separately identified in the keys, but I doubt this would cause confusion given the straightforward simplicity of the keys for species identification.

Species accounts emphasize identification, but include comments on habitat and biology where available. I suspect we actually know little about the biology and ecology of most of Australia’s sharks and rays. Each account includes a map of the species’ distribution, comments about systematics, and references to the literature. There is a comprehensive list of references, a checklist of species, and indices to both scientific and common names that makes finding species (including alternative names) and moving between plates and species accounts easy.

All in all this is a superb book. Anyone interested in Australia’s fish (or fishing) will find it both useful and informative. Given the high level of commercial exploitation of sharks and rays globally and in Australian waters, it is important that the systematics and biology of this group being as fully understood as possible so as to achieve the best possible management and conservation of species. This includes species, such as the smaller skates, shovelnose rays, and stingrays, which I commonly see being taken and dispatched as unwanted bycatch by recreation anglers. *Sharks and Rays of Australia* makes a highly commendable contribution to the appreciation, understanding, and conservation of this group of fishes and I want to thank the editors, Peter Last and John Stevens, and CSIRO Publications for a job well-done.

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