

Book Review

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Penguins: The Animal Answer Guide

G.L. Kooyman and W. Lynch
John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2013
ISBN-13: 978-1421410517 (Paperback), 184pp. £17.50

In the current era of electronic access to information obtained through various search engines and the near-immediate delivery of the requested information on a screen, a book with 100 questions and answers on various aspects of penguin ecology, biology and conservation might seem somewhat of an anachronism. This is not the case and I am sure many others are thankful that book publishers continue to produce volumes for reading in the hand, rather than on a screen.

The 12 broad headings for the questions are “Introducing Penguins”, “Form and Function”, “Penguin Colors” (sic), “Penguin Behavior” (sic), “Penguin Ecology”, “Reproduction and Development”, “Food and Feeding”, “Penguins and Humans”, “Penguin Problems (from a human viewpoint)”, “Human Problems (from a penguin’s viewpoint)”, “Penguins in Stories and Literature” and “Penguinology”. Each heading has between four and 12 questions. The 100 questions are supported with 185 references - these are not cited directly in the text but are provided in a Bibliography that included citations to 2011.

Appendix A lists 17 species, recognising royal penguins *Eudyptes schlegeli* as a species. Appendix B provides a list of “Penguin Research and Conservation Organizations”, listing six conservation organizations such the Magellanic Penguin Project and the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, but just three government research organisations - the US Antarctic Program, CNRS in France and British Antarctic Survey, with details of their activities and field research. No mention of SCAR or of CCAMLR, or of the numerous other government organizations elsewhere contributing to penguin research, conservation and management.

In the Acknowledgements, the authors indicate that their target audience are their, “grandkids ... and everyone else’s”. The text is clear and written to an informed

layperson, rather than someone’s grandkid. Every now and then, Gerry’s 30+ years of physiological research peeps through in some of the answers - terms such as “nociceptive pain” are used to answer the question of “*Do penguins feel pain?*” and the answer to the question about how to age a penguin involves a discussion on telomere restriction fragment shortening on linear chromosomes.

Without looking for errors of fact, I found two on one page. In the answer to the question, “*What should I do if I find an injured penguin?*” the answer reports on vagrant young emperor penguins in “South Australia”, when in fact there have been no records from Australia for this species. On the same page, the answer to “*How can I see penguins in the wild?*” the answer locates Phillip Island in South Australia, rather than Victoria. I see these as minor points and do not detract from the value of the book.

Whilst browsing through the book, I was reminded of an earlier volume on penguins (Davis 2007). A check of the contents of the two books found minimal overlap. This is not to suggest either is incomplete, rather that each provides a different perspective and different approach to dealing with the wealth of knowledge that we have on penguins - tinged by the authors’ own interests; these two books are complementary.

It is highly likely that every question posed and answered in this book could be found online somewhere on the host of penguin-centric web pages, but not in a well-presented format like this. The layout is uncluttered and the images illustrate species and answers appropriately. I can imagine this book being found in the libraries of the numerous tour vessels heading south each season, providing a ready answer to many first-time travellers’ on-the-spot questions that emerge on first contact. Similarly, school libraries full of the “grandkids” for whom the book was written would benefit from having this book on their shelves - as long as their staff can convince the financial bean counters who believe “everything” is on the internet of the error of their beliefs.

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Reference

DAVIS, L.S. 2007. *Penguins: The Ultimate Question and Answer Book*. London: Collins.