

Stig Skreslet
Bodø University College
N-8049 Bodø, Norway

Book Review

Á. Borja and M. Collins (Editors) 2004. Oceanography and Marine Environment of the Basque Country. Elsevier Oceanography Series 70. Elsevier B.V., Amsterdam. 616 pp. ISBN 0-444-51581-X. ISSN 0422-9894 (Series).

This is not a book that you probably start reading from the first page. Its 24 review chapters have informative titles and are organised in seven sections that together with a four-page location index and an eight-page subject index invites you to dive for your favourite subjects. The editors have succeeded to structure the book in ways that makes easy navigation amongst its wealth of information.

The title of the book is accurate but may fool the potential reader into believing that it is of relevance only to Vasco, the Spanish region of the Basque people. Admittedly, much of the information is geographically located to the eastern part of the Cantabrian Sea that borders the northern coast of the Iberia peninsula. However, the systems ecology approach draw connections on larger geographical scales that involves physical and chemical processes, plankton ecology and habitats for fish, seabirds, sea turtles and sea mammals that populate the Bay of Biscay and even larger population systems. Added to this blend is much information on how humans have interacted with the system, from the heroic days of medieval fishing and whale hunting to modern times of over-fishing, pollution, scientific research, and management of fisheries, conservation of wildlife and recovery of harmed marine communities. Thus, the editorial approach may be recommended as a blueprint for similar efforts within regional marine ecological science.

Three chapters are devoted to plankton. One on bacterioplankton and phytoplankton, and another on invertebrate zooplankton are comprehensive reviews on community structures and production, mainly restricted to Basque estuaries. They reflect the current state-of-art which means that little research on shelf and oceanic assemblages has been made. The third chapter on ichthyoplankton is quite different. Being related to the extensive work organised by the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES), it deals with the regional characteristics of the entire Bay of Biscay. By doing that, the chapter demonstrates the importance of the south-eastern coastal waters of the Bay of Biscay as habitats for spawning and larval growth in many fish populations.

No chapter is by one single author, and most are written by more than two specialists within the fields dealt with. The authors refer their information to extensive lists of recent reports that are written in Spanish, and to papers published in renowned international journals. Thus, little documented information seems to have escaped the scientific reviews presented in each particular chapter. This impression is supported by the list of authors where Basque scientists share the space with other Spanish and European colleagues. The co-editor and many other authors work at British institutes. That may explain why the texts are so fluent and easily read. The book is a splendid example of how an international community of scientists may cooperate to present a very successful result.

The graphical artwork is in black-and-white or in grey-scales. The illustrations are mostly very good, but there are cases with weak grey-scale contrasts which have caused loss of details during printing. Except for such details, the book presents itself as a very attractive item.

The book should be of interest to all scientists who look for information on the marine ecology of the Bay of Biscay. It is well balanced according to themes, which will satisfy scientists from all marine disciplines. The texts are written by use of general scientific terms and with no use of specialised algorithms scary to anybody. Thus, the information is accessible to all generalists with interdisciplinary interests. It should be welcomed as a textbook by environmental managers who want to develop their understanding of the marine environment. It will certainly reach a large number of graduate students who seek tips on methods and scientific approach in their master and doctoral programs.

I do not hesitate to give this splendid book my enthusiastic recommendation.