

## ZOOLOGY

**We Are All Whalers: the Plight of Whales and our Responsibility**

By Michael J. Moore. 2021. University of Chicago Press. 224 pages, 25.00 USD, Cloth, E-book.

Large whales around the world have been under constant threat from human activities for centuries. Commercial whaling reduced most populations of whales to very low numbers up until the mid-20th century. Since the end of most global commercial whaling, many populations have recovered to some extent. However, many whales now face new threats from commercial fishing and marine vessel traffic. Whales that enter commercial shipping lanes can be struck by vessels (known as ship strikes or vessel strikes), resulting in serious injury and often death, and whales that interact with commercial fishing gear (ropes, nets) can become entangled, which also causes injury that can lead to death if the whale remains entangled for long periods. Both ship strikes and entanglement are serious concerns for one whale species in particular, North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW; *Eubalaena glacialis*). NARW were a popular target species for commercial whalers and were nearly driven to extinction, but have since rebounded to just over 400 individuals. However, in the past four years (2017–2021), at least 50 NARW have died or have been seriously injured, leading to population size estimates of <350 individuals (NOAA 2021). All of these injuries and deaths with known causes were from ship strikes and entanglement with fishing gear. NARW are in a crisis right now, therefore it is crucial to find solutions to reduce these unnecessary mortalities and injuries to this species. This crisis for NARW, as well as similar entanglement and ship strikes to other whale species, is the impetus behind *We Are All Whalers*.

This book is not just about NARW: it is also a bit of an autobiography of the author, Michael Moore, although that it is not its main purpose. The book gives a lot of background on Moore: his training, experiences, and what led him to the thesis of the book, which is that more needs to be done to protect NARW. The book is filled with very interesting stories and, for those like me who study whales, many familiar names pop up throughout the book as Moore interacted and collaborated with many very well-known whale researchers throughout his career. The most striking of these stories to me was Moore's first season at sea doing fieldwork, where he



was a research assistant for Hal Whitehead, a world-renowned whale biologist who at that time was a Ph.D. student studying Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Moore's amazing experiences during that first field season are likely largely responsible for his focus on whales throughout his career. Although many of the stories in the early chapters of the book are not focussed on NARW, these stories add interesting context on Moore's journey from naïve student to experienced wildlife veterinarian and biologist. I found these stories really enjoyable to read, even though they were not relevant to NARW; this is likely because I am a biologist who enjoys fieldwork. There is even an entire chapter devoted to a trip that Moore took to Utqiagvik, Alaska, to learn about Bowhead Whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) harvested as part of the subsistence hunt by the Iñupiat of that region. This chapter certainly stood out to me, because I study that particular population of whales. Moore uses his experience in Utqiagvik to make the argument that if people who harvest whales for subsistence, like the Iñupiat, can also co-exist with those whales and not negatively affect the population, then people who are not harvesting whales should be able to do the same.

All of the context provided in the early chapters of this book sets up Moore's expertise and adds credibility to the main arguments that he makes in the book. Moore was trained as a veterinarian at University of Cambridge and obtained his Ph.D. in biological oceanography from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. He was involved in some of the earliest necropsies of deceased NARW on the east coast of the United States and has been involved in researching NARW, especially their mortalities, since the mid-1990s. Needless to say, he is a world-renowned expert on NARW and assessing cause of death for whales.

The title of this book was quite intriguing to me as I began reading the text but, on the surface, its meaning is perhaps not obvious. Moore's main thesis is that NARW are continuing to die due to human nature: our demand for goods and seafood is the root cause of the ship strikes and entanglements currently plaguing NARW. Even though we are not killing whales on purpose like the commercial whalers of old, our behaviour is still leading to unnecessary suffering and death of these complex, social animals. The final chapter of this book really sums up this idea and what we as consumers need to do to make a change: only purchasing seafood that is harvested in a sustainable

manner that does not threaten whales with entanglement and only purchasing goods that do not increase ship strike risk to whales. Economic pressures may very well be a powerful tool that can cause a change in the commercial fishing and shipping industries, but for it to work a large proportion of the human population would need to change their spending habits. The main point of this book was to educate the general public about the plight of NARW and other large whales and specifically make people aware of what they can do to help these animals. I sincerely hope that many people will read this book and that positive change will happen for NARW.

This book is written in a fairly accessible way; it generally avoids scientific jargon and is filled with interesting stories, so should be appropriate for a general audience, even if the reader has very little scientific knowledge. The target audience will likely be anyone with an interest in whales, conservation,

or environmentalism. Some parts of the book might be too graphic for some readers, with descriptions of whale death and injury, as well as descriptions of the necropsies performed on dead whales. However, it is certainly important for readers to understand what happens to these whales to evoke empathy. Overall, this book was a very good read, and I highly recommend it.

### Literature Cited

NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration]. 2021. North Atlantic Right Whale. Accessed 3 January 2022. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/north-atlantic-right-whale>.

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