

Book Reviews

Freshwater Fishes of the Fly River Papua New Guinea. Authors: Gerald R Allen, Andrew W. Storey and Markson Yarrao.

Price...\$20 from the ANGFA Shop

Reviewed by *John Cousins*

The obvious first impressions of this book are that the use of colour is wonderful, it is a handy size and the topics are worthwhile and interesting. I found the binding a bit restrictive.

I confess to a few misgivings about the Publisher: Ok Tedi Mining, but the issue of the impact on the mine on the river is dealt with in the book. On a really positive note, it was printed in Australia.

I was impressed with the inclusion of a map to show the various reaches of the river. Throughout the book there is inclusion of indigenous names for fish, as well as the scientific and common (English) names.

There is a comprehensive introduction covering a diversity of topics and providing a range of useful statistics. The Fly is 1200 k. long and has a discharge of 6000 litres per second, the 23rd largest river system in the world (in terms of output).

I found the history of ichthyologic discoveries in this part of the world evocative and well written. However "vast areas of New Guinea remain unexplored to this day. Although 375 species have been recorded to date, many new discoveries can be expected." (p.5)

Mention is made of the fact that the Ok Tedi mine contributes 44 million tonnes per annum of waste rock to the river and 30 million tonnes of tailings. As if that wasn't bad enough, the Porgera Joint Venture Mine adds 8 million tonnes of waste rock and 6 million tonnes of tailings waste per annum too!

Perhaps more could have been made of these issues. But other threats such as the impact of the mine workers on the river, the increase in forestry and the Indonesian program of transmigration (with the consequent introduction of really invasive fishes such as snakeheads, climbing perch and walking catfish!) are all briefly addressed.

Under the sub-heading *Endemism*, the point is made that "virtually all of the species that lack marine dispersal are endemic to the island, with the exception of 35 species that are shared with Australia." (p. 8).

Under the *Ecology* heading we learn that "several fishes, including rainbowfishes exhibit spawning peaks during the rainy season" (p.9.) I wondered whether this observation in nature had implications for us as hobbyists?

In the section on *Reproductive Biology*, I was interested to learn of mouth brooders such as the Saratoga and fork-tailed catfish. New Guinea pipefish are pouch brooders, whereas the nursery fish keep their eggs in a very strange place indeed!

There are also sections on Preserving Fishes; Fish Photography and Dangerous Fishes, (the spines of all catfish species from the Fly System are venomous'. P. 12.)

The larger part of the book is a catalogue of the species of fishes of PNG arranged in alphabetical order of the scientific name. There is a brief introduction for each family of fishes with notes on distribution and life history, as well as an illustrated identification key. Often this is accompanied by a great habitat photo.

For each species (one species per page), there are 5 sections:

A photo or drawing

Diagnosis, which is basically the description.

Habitat and Abundance

Distribution

Local Names

I think this is a very sensible way to present a lot of valuable information.

The photos are generally excellent, but there are a couple I might comment on.

