

BOOK REVIEW

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Underwater to Get Out of the Rain: A Love Affair with the Sea. 2004 in the U.K.; 2006 in the U.S. Trevor Norton. Da Capo Press, Perseus Books Group, 11 Cambridge Center, Cambridge, MA 02142. 385 p. Web address: www.dacapopress.com. Hardcover, US\$ 25.00.

Marine ecologists, like scientists in many other subdisciplines, are perpetually reinventing the intellectual wheel. Putatively new concepts in marine ecology are often decades-old ideas from plant ecology, or worse, fresh buzzwords for well-worn ideas in our own field. Provincialism is another barrier to forward movement: American marine ecologists don't pay enough attention to what goes on in Britain or anywhere else. As a prime example of this parochial American attitude, Trevor Norton's new book shows that investigators working along the British coast conducted manipulative experiments on competition, herbivory, and predation well before the American pioneers of the rocky intertidal exploded onto the scene.

The cure, of course, is to read widely, but being well-read is a more elusive goal than ever thanks to the Internet. So do yourself a favor and read this autobiographical account, because it highlights, in an enjoyable narrative style, some of what the British have contributed to marine ecology. Along the way, you will also be treated to delightful vignettes of natural history and, even better, plenty of laughs.

Trevor Norton came of age in the 1950s, exploring the coast of his native Northumberland. His early passion for the seashore was transmogrified into his life's profession. In becoming a marine biologist, he found he could carry on a torrid affair with the sea and, for so doing, receive at least a modicum of monetary compensation. Norton reports that, during one early dive, he was startled by a cormorant speeding past him underwater in search of fish—a once-in-a-lifetime experience emblematic of all that is good about devoting one's career to marine science.

Norton completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Liverpool. After a stint at the University of Glasgow and a lot of diving in the Hebrides, trips to California and the Friday Harbor Laboratories off the coast of Washington, and other assorted adventures, he became director of the Univer-

sity of Liverpool's Port Erin Marine Laboratory on the Isle of Man in 1983. He retired as director in 2005. I met him at Port Erin in 1986, when I was a NATO Postdoctoral Fellow studying dense populations of brittlestars, which abound in the British Isles. During one dive on the breakwater at Port Erin, I was lucky enough to share the experience of a cormorant shooting past me like nobody's business.

There are heroes in abundance, unsung and otherwise. The pioneering deep-sea biologist Edward Forbes surely would have been the most celebrated son of the Isle of Man, had not fellow Manxman Fletcher Christian previously organized the mutiny on the *Bounty*. It's pretty tough to top that one. William Herdman, the professor at Liverpool who founded the Port Erin laboratory, explored the Irish Sea in the late 1800s and provided observation and insight enough to motivate generations of researchers. And for unintentional satire on a grand scale (among other achievements), there is Sir Alistair Hardy. An offhand remark Hardy threw out in a 1960 lecture became the aquatic-ape hypothesis of human evolution, and it drove anthropologists to distraction for decades. My favorites are Jack Kitching and John Ebling, who learned so much in Lough Ine in Ireland; and Norman Jones, Joanna (Kain) Jones, and Trevor Norton himself, who did the first critical experimental work on food-web dynamics on that breakwater at Port Erin.

This book is fun. There is plenty of hard science, but it is stealthily interdigitated with remarks so sarcastic they could scorch the barnacles off the hull of a boat. Norton takes on harmful algal blooms, the physiology of free-diving in both pinnipeds and Ama pearl divers, Lessepsian migration (that is, biotic invasion of the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal), vision in teleostean fishes, degradation of coral reefs, overfishing and pollution of estuarine environments, the destructive effects of trawling on benthic habitats, and why those nasty barnacles have the biggest penises in the deep blue sea.

There are some solemn digressions, including a detailed discussion of Jewish internment camps on the Isle of Man during the Second World War, and the last chapter will break your heart. Nevertheless, if you appreciate dry wit you will read this book with a smile on your face. You may even attract embarrassing atten-

tion by laughing like an idiot in public. I know I have. Trevor Norton reminds us that, whatever befalls us in life, marine ecology remains a worthy profession and a healthy obsession.

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