

## **Book Review**

# **A Complete Guide to the Freshwater Fishes of Southern Africa**

P.H. Skelton

Illustrated by Dave Voorvelt and Elizabeth Tarr

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388 pages

Price: Hardback R90, Paperback R80

Those of us interested in freshwater fishes and related environmental issues have waited several years for Paul Skelton's *A Complete Guide to the Freshwater Fishes of Southern Africa*. The final result proves to be well worth the long wait, for with this book the author manages to disseminate a reasonable amount of detailed information on freshwater fishes to the layman, angler and naturalist. Although Skelton's book is not specifically aimed at the scientist, it contains condensed, updated and accurate information on description, distribution, conservation status, biology, ecology and the many uses of the freshwater fishes of southern Africa. Dave Voorvelt's and Elizabeth Tarr's remarkably detailed illustrations of the 245 fish species, including 29 marine and estuarine species, are without doubt an outstanding feature of this book.

With the growing interest in biotic diversity, it is quite intriguing that relatively little is known about the most diverse group of vertebrates, namely fish, and particularly freshwater fish. To this end, Skelton makes a much needed and valuable contribution with his comprehensive publication.

The first 86 pages of this 388 page book contain valuable information for a wide variety of interest groups. The book also includes concise information on issues such as: a historical overview of southern African freshwater ichthyology; relevant geographical facets; illustrated information on aquatic systems and habitats; factors affecting the distribution of freshwater, fishes; fish biology and ecology as well as man's various uses of freshwater fishes with special emphasis on the southern African situation.

The section on threatened fishes and relevant conservation issues will most certainly be welcomed by all conservationists and also those interested in environmental education. Information on fish classification, taxonomy and nomenclature, as well as the collection and preservation of indigenous fish species, are presented in a balanced and responsible way.

In the main section of the book information is provided on aspects such as description, distribution, biology/ecology and general uses for each of the 245 species. This information is provided in a concise and user-friendly manner.

It is heartening to note that there is also an Afrikaans edition of this book, thus making its valuable contents available to a substantial number of Afrikaans-speaking anglers and naturalists. This brings me, however, to my only real criticism, namely that as an Afrikaans-speaking naturalist and ichthyologist, I found the use of my home language in the Afrikaans edition to be rather old-fashioned and not always in touch with present day jargon in this particular field of expertise. Many of the words used are peculiar artificial translations for which there are more practical and appropriate terms in daily use.

Congratulations to Paul Skelton and his co-workers for an excellent and most welcome contribution to our knowledge on the freshwater fishes of southern Africa.

*K.C.D. HAMMAN*

*Cape Nature Conservation*

