



Book Review

Book Review: Weedon, G.P.; Chapman, S.D. *Ichthyosaurs from the Early Jurassic of Britain; Monograph Series; Siri Scientific Press: Manchester, UK, 2022; ISBN: 978-1-8381528-6-4*

Eric Buffetaut

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (UMR 8538), Laboratoire de Géologie de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure, PSL Research University, 24 Rue Lhomond, 75231 Paris Cedex 05, France; eric.buffetaut@sfr.fr

The often beautifully preserved ichthyosaurs from the early Jurassic of Britain occupy a special place in the history of palaeontology. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, thanks to the spectacular discoveries by Mary Anning in the Lyme Regis area of Dorset and Thomas Hawkins in Somerset, these marine “sea-monsters”, as they were sometimes dubbed, attracted the attention of both the scientific community and the general public. Their description contributed to no small extent to the recognition of a remote “Age of Reptiles”, when the seas had been populated by strange creatures unlike any animals living today. The impressive gallery of fossil marine reptiles at the Natural History Museum in London testifies to this Victorian fascination for ichthyosaurs and other extinct “saurians”.

In this sizeable monograph (447 pages), Graham Weedon and Sandra Chapman provide much more than a review of the ichthyosaurs from the Liassic rocks of Britain. The first sections of the book are in fact a sort of encyclopaedia of ichthyosaurs, beginning with a description of their anatomy and fossilization (chapters 1 and 2). Chapter 3 deals with the curation of ichthyosaur collections, with special emphasis on that of the Natural History Museum—including a valuation of historically important specimens. Chapter 4, on ichthyosaurs in time and space, contains a very useful list of all ichthyosaur genera with their geographical and stratigraphical origins, complemented by palaeogeographical maps showing their spatial distribution. This is followed by a highly interesting second section on ichthyosaur palaeobiology, with chapters on evolutionary history, reproduction and growth, vision and other senses, diet, locomotion and pathology (chapters 5 to 10). Although evidence about all these aspects of ichthyosaur palaeontology has come from many sources, notably the famous Toarcian black shales of the Holzmaden region of southern Germany, the remarkably preserved specimens from the British Lias have provided a significant part of the available information.

The third, and longest, section of the book is a detailed systematic review of the Liassic ichthyosaurs of Britain, with a list of all known specimens and taxa. Compiling this list must have involved an amazing amount of research work, considering that 46 institutions in the United Kingdom and 16 in foreign countries are listed as possessing specimens. The review actually goes farther, since specimens of non-British origin (especially the Posidonia shales of southern Germany) are also mentioned when systematic discussions make it necessary. Unsurprisingly, the list of references takes up more than 40 pages. The final appendices are a useful guide to the specimens and the institutions where they are held.

The numerous illustrations, most of them in colour (including the beautiful cover picture by John Sibbick), are of the high standard that is a hallmark of Siri scientific publications.



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This book will be an invaluable resource for all palaeontologists with an interest in ichthyosaurs. More than two centuries after the first scientific descriptions, our knowledge of these remarkable marine reptiles has increased enormously, and this volume provides a remarkable and up-to-date synthesis of the historically and scientifically important taxa from the Liassic of Britain.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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