

## **Fishes of Nova Scotia: Species Recorded in the Accession Books of Harry Piers from 1899 to 1939**

By John Gilhen. 1999. Museum of Natural History, Nova Scotia Museum, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture. Curatorial Reports (89): 1-153, 107 plates.

In cramped offices and labs, with penurious financial support, devoted natural history museum curators, like Harry Piers of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, built the foundations of knowledge in the natural sciences. Harry Piers worked for 40 years advancing the state of knowledge, communicating with his peers in other institutions, and providing a valuable service to the province.

Harry Piers collected fishes himself, purchased some, encouraged others to make donations. His harvest included teeth from a great white shark which attacked and left its teeth in the rowboat of a fisher, down to the small-sized rainbow smelt and pipefish. He accessioned, identified, and conserved the specimens. He corresponded with scientists like Phillip Cox and David Starr Jordan to ensure identifications and nomenclature were correct. He added 13 species of fishes to the known ichthyofauna of Nova Scotia.

The older documentation provided by assiduous museum records like those compiled by Piers, is important. They establish the occurrence and status of species, then common, now rare or endangered. For example the Acadian whitefish he first reported, as the Sault white-fish, is now classed as endangered, and the big skate populations, healthy in those days, are now greatly diminished due to trawling. Museum specimens have the advantage over literature records, in that one can return to verify the identification and so certify the original identification was correct — or not so, or that it was a species then not known to science.

Following an instructive Foreward and Introduction, Gilhen provides an annotated list of Pier's fish accessions, with accession numbers, name, location, and other data. These data are sometimes enriched by references to supplementary information drawn from correspondence, publications, newspapers, or other sources. We learn about the habits of the Acadian whitefish, prone to leap 2 to 6 inches

out of the water after flying insects, fishing methods for bluefin tuna (weirs and harpoons), and the capture of the first tarpon from Canada. Following the list are 107 plates. The plates document the accessioning methods, correspondence, drawings of specimens with measurements, and photos of interesting specimens.

One myth John explodes is handwriting. We are given to understand from our elders that Pier's was the age of beautiful copper-plate script handwriting. But Pier's handwriting, a challenge to the interpreter, kept to the standards of the medical doctor in writing prescriptions.

This book carefully documents Pier's contributions in ichthyology, but mentions also that this pioneer was active in tracing master gold- and silver-smith marks, was active in artists' and authors' societies, and was the Nova Scotia representative of the Geographic Board of Canada.

John Gilhen is to be commended for documenting the rich contributions that Harry Piers made to Nova Scotia ichthyology, and the Museum of Natural History for publishing this record. Hopefully this will lead to a better understanding of roles of natural history museums, their curators and technicians in society. It is seldom that museums, known more for their modesty than celebrating their own, document what they provide for the understanding of nature and the edification of humankind. John Gilhen has brought to his task the experience of many years in curatorial work in ichthyology and herpetology at the Nova Scotia Museum. This shows in the well-rounded evaluation of the works of Harry Piers.

Perhaps in the New Millennium, governments will begin to bolster instead of cutting back the human and other resources needful to understanding the natural world in which we all live.

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## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Quantitative Analysis of Movement**

By Peter Turchin. 1998. Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts. ix+396 pp., illus. U.S.\$18.95.

A central problem for all naturalists is how organisms of interest get from one place to another. In this

book Turchin, a mathematical ecologist at the University of Connecticut, laudably aims at a popular account of spatial dynamics strategically using models linking theory and data. First described are types of observations and models. Behaviourally-





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