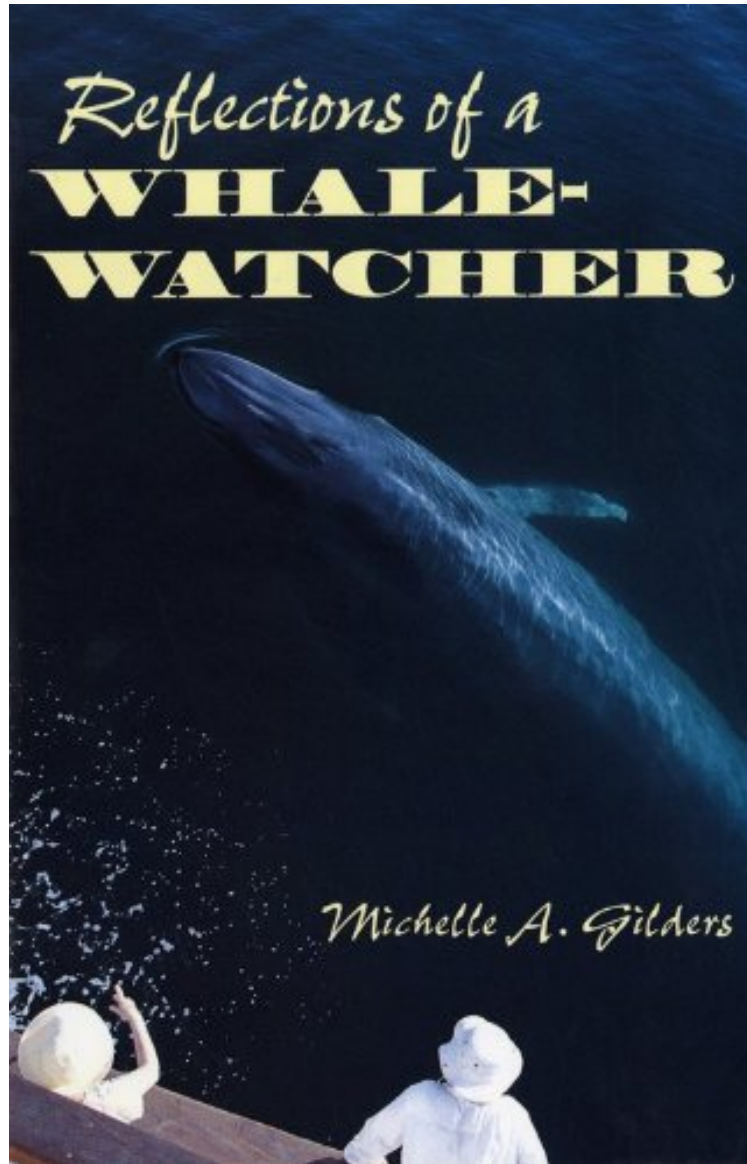


[Ebook free] Reflections of a Whale-Watcher

## Reflections of a Whale-Watcher

*Michelle A. Gilders*

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#4056570 in Books 1995-02-22 1995-02-22 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x .88 x 6.121, 1.06 #File Name: 0253209579288 pages | File size: 20.Mb

**Michelle A. Gilders : Reflections of a Whale-Watcher** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reflections of a Whale-Watcher:

"This story about touching whales and whales touching us touches a cultural nerve. An important, informed, and insightful book. Powerful." Lee Sterrenberg, Indiana University "The first time I saw a whale, I looked into its eye and

saw myself reflected." For Michelle Gilders, this moment was a revelation and becomes for us the start of a marvelous journey into the realm of the great whales. Gilders weaves a spellbinding account of her voyages through the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean in search of whales. Along the way, she takes us to the desert of Baja California to witness its diverse and remarkable wildlife. She recounts the whaling history of the area and the pressures brought to bear on this region and its wildlife. In the rough beauty of Baja, Gilders ponders ecological complexity, environmental issues, and ethical concerns, while immersing the reader in the sights and sounds of a desert awash in the whale-haunted seas. Gilders's encounters with whales occasion reflections on such matters as speciation and evolution, the diversity of life, the role of politics and science in the treatment of animal populations, and the ethical and moral dilemmas that face us as we contemplate the possible sentience of non-human animals. Written for a general readership, the book is an enthralling, deeply reflective, and scientifically accurate portrait of the great whales and our long and often troubled encounter with them.

From Publishers Weekly There be whales here, all right, but you have to weather a heavy sea of prose to get to them. Gilders made four trips to the Sea of Cortez in Baja California between 1989 and 1992 to observe gray whales, blue whales, humpbacks and others. She proclaims early on that "the amateur whale-watcher need make no apology for emotional enthrallment and wide-eyed wonder." Unfortunately, the author parlays her wonder into an overlong discourse that zigzags from travelogue to zoology text to personal diary in a disorganized fashion that does the whale and the reader no favors. For every interesting nugget—and there are plenty, such as Gilders's speculation about why whales breach ("the biology of energetics tells us that the event must 'mean' something to the animal"), there are many more instances of vagueness ("My images of Baja are an amalgam of thoughts during and after the event, of changing perceptions, and of relating past histories and future potential to what we have in the present."). The pity is that Gilders doesn't seem to trust her material. During a narrative account of two male humpbacks clashing over a female, the reader is convinced. What need, then, for so many Zoology 101 and New Age detours ("you feel as though the dream continues, that the world around you is part of you and apart from you")? Perhaps there is a clue later on in the book, when Gilders writes, self-consciously, "There is an arrogance in the written word." One wishes at moments like this that there were less reflecting and more whale-watching. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal This book has two parts, the first recounting the author's four whale-watching ventures and the second offering an extensive essay on bioethics. The whale-watching occurred in and around Baja California, Mexico, in the lagoons noted for the "friendlies," the gray whales that approach small boats full of humans and allow themselves to be touched. Gilders describes the connectedness she felt and the power and majesty of these incredible beings. She also offers detailed descriptions of the other creatures in the water and on the desert shores nearby. The second portion (though only about one-fifth of the book) is Gilders's extended bioethics lecture. She discusses why we must care about endangered species and their habitats, from the smallest insects to the magnificent blue whale. The result is a convincing and logical essay that includes a good history of the politics of whaling. Recommended for public and academic libraries. (Photos not seen.)—Nancy Moeckel, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, Ohio Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist "If God were a fish, he'd be a whale," wrote Melville in *Moby Dick*, and taking that lead, Gilders brings the reader up close to the mighty Leviathan, close enough to touch and reflect on the experience. An employee of British Petroleum in Alaska and an ardent environmentalist, Gilders often travels down the coast to Baja following the migratory path of whales and other cetaceans. Among the creatures she waxes eloquent about are humpbacks, gray whales, blue whales, sea lions, elephant seals, and dolphins. In the appendixes are complete lists of known whale species and their characteristics as well as a guide to the flora and fauna of Baja. Interesting insights are posed on the minimal effect of oil compared with the hazards posed by other pollutants, the methods of capturing whales, and human invasion of their territory. Most impressive is Gilders' impassioned, intelligent plea for a solution to the human (not a whale) problem that poses a threat to all of nature. Denise Perry Donavin