

# The Tilapia Trail - The Life Story of a Fish Biologist

Ro Lowe-McConnell. MPM publishing, Ascot, UK, £20  
Review by Ben Belton, Systems Group

Ro McConnell was an early pioneer in studying the ecology of freshwater fishes in Africa's rift valley lakes. One of the principle subjects of her research was the evolution of cichlid fishes, particularly the tilapias from which this book takes its title. Fascinated by the natural world and the allure of Africa as a child, McConnell cut her teeth during the Second World War as a trainee zoologist at the Freshwater Biological Association in England's Lake District, jumping at the chance to visit Africa on a fisheries survey expedition. Here she would spend the next 12 years collecting and documenting diverse fish fauna from around the continent under the auspices of several colonial organisations and the British

Museum of Natural History. These efforts were to assist in taxonomic classification of the multitude of rapidly evolving cichlid species found there, and develop understanding and management of fisheries ecology in the African Great Lakes. In the latter part of her career McConnell was to visit Latin America to document the fish species of the Amazon basin and advance work on the convergent evolutionary pathways of species from the two continents. She would also play a role in the early development of tilapia aquaculture through her involvement in FAO and ICLARM efforts to enhance the fish's cultivation for food production.

Although there is much in this story to grab the attention of devotees of fish biology it falls somewhat short as an autobiography. It is apparent from the narrative that McConnell is a singular individual who has led a rich and fascinating life, but there is disappointingly little by way of personal anecdotes, social commentary or descriptive prose to flesh out this impression. Rather, her life reads more as a detailed list of research projects, colleagues and institutions. This reservation aside, the book offers a window into a scientific discipline which, like the cichlids to which McConnell devoted her life's work, has rapidly evolved to achieve ever greater levels of sophistication and colonize new niches. For myself, as a non-biologist, the book also offered an excellent entry point from which to discover more about the origins and behaviour of the fish around which much of my work now revolves.

## Tilapia Biology, Culture and Nutrition

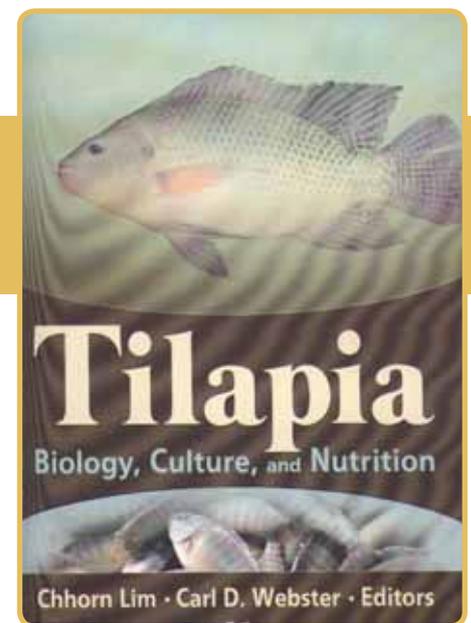
Edited by Lim C. and Webster, C. D.  
Published by Haworth Press Inc. 2006 USD\$149.95 (£76.50p)  
678 pages  
Review by Kim Jauncey

My initial reaction on receiving this volume to review was to question the title. Even though I am a nutritionist myself and, of course, I think nutrition is the most important aspect of aquaculture I do not believe that it should be the only biological discipline in the title of a general review such as this. However, both of the Editors of this book are themselves principally nutritionists so perhaps that explains the title.

Another issue that I had on first looking at this publication was that all but one of the 31 named contributors to this volume are from the USA. Even the one that is not a visiting researcher at the University of Michigan. Given that the USA is not presently, nor has it been historically, the global leader in either

tilapia production or tilapia research I find this surprising. Indeed, in many cases it is clear that the contributors to this volume are not internationally recognised leading authorities on the topics that they have reviewed.

This substantial volume, in 19 chapters, progresses mostly logically from biology, through culture, to processing, marketing and economics. There are, however, some inconsistencies and oddities in the overall structure. For example Chapter 2 (Prospects and Potential for Global Production) sits between Chapter 1 (Biology) and Chapter 3 (Control of Growth). Surely the material in Chapter 2 should have formed a separate introductory section? It is not clear to me why pond soil and water quality measurement (Chapter 11) is disassociated from pond production (Chapter 7). I am also at something of a loss to understand why Streptococcal Vaccinology in Aquaculture (Chapter 17) has a whole chapter to itself or even how it fits into the general remit of this volume on tilapia



biology and culture. Chapter 18 (Harvest, Handling and Processing) is astounding in such a review volume as it does not contain a single reference or source. If this were the work of my students it would constitute serious plagiarism (after all, the information must have come from somewhere). The chapter reads like entirely personal and unsubstantiated anecdote and does not do justice to this vitally important subject area.

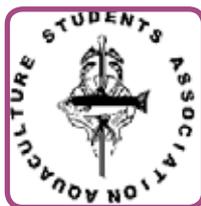
This publication has been produced to relatively low production values in terms of the quality of the overall presentation. There

are relatively few tables and figures, no colour, and only 20 or so half-tone photographs. In several cases the photographs are so poorly reproduced as to be virtually useless.

The indexing of this volume is also a little confusing as the normally indexed terms are mixed with indexing of all of the cited author's names.

In conclusion I feel that this book represents something of a missed opportunity that suffers from low-cost presentation (especially the photographs), a somewhat poorly thought out structure and organisation and in some places the content is a little weak. It is suggested by the publishers that it is a useful reference tool for 'students, educators, researchers and tilapia culturists'. For students at postgraduate level it might provide some additional tilapia-focused reading but would not be a core text, for educators it might also provide information to supplement teaching materials but I am not aware of any programme that would devote so much time to just one group of aquaculture species. For researchers this book may have some value in providing a context for their research but it is insufficiently detailed in any particular aspect of tilapia culture or biology to be considered a research reference text. For tilapia culturists the volume does provide a broad general context but it is certainly not a practical guide, indeed in many areas I felt that it lacked practical interpretation of the research reviewed. Whilst appreciating the difficulty of compiling a volume on such a broad and complex topic I do not think this book has achieved an appropriate balance between breadth and depth/detail or provision of useful practical summaries. However, despite its flaws, even if you don't buy one, you should have access to a copy of this book.

# ASA NEWS



ASA, the Aquaculture Students Association, is THE association for all postgraduate students of the Institute of Aquaculture. A new committee has recently been appointed, consisting of Sara Picon (Parasitology), Mayra Grano Maldonado (Parasitology), Sophie Fridman (Parasitology), Catherine Lecouffe (Aquaculture systems and development), Jorge Del Pozo (Bacteriology), Eric Leclercq (Reproduction), Nazael Madalla (Nutrition) and Siba (Msc Rep.).

ASA is the link between the students and the Institute/University. It represents postgraduate aquaculture students informally in various meetings, during which decisions are made on ways to maintain and improve students' life and rights. ASA committee members are always available to inform and support the students on request for any problem they might encounter.

ASA organises events, such as ceilidhs and tea and coffee get togethers, giving everyone the opportunity to get to know other researchers and students from the different groups of the Institute. Last year, ASA had a poster at Aquaculture 2006, an exhibition taking place every other year at the SECC in Glasgow. This year ASA is planning to organise week-



ends away, visits to fish farms, a badminton tournament and to reintroduce the famous ASA mug.

Any students reading these lines and wishing to get involved can do so by contacting ASA at [aquasa@stir.ac.uk](mailto:aquasa@stir.ac.uk) or come and see us directly. The new committee is also keen on developing the ever 'under construction' ASA website (<http://www.aqua.stir.ac.uk/asa/home/index.htm>), go and check it for more news about ASA.

We look forward to welcoming you to Stirling.



The ASA angels team



Professor S.A. Agbede, from University of Ibadan, Nigeria, viewing one of the university's complete collection of Aquaculture News. It is great to have that resource in a part of Africa where aquaculture is increasingly important.

## Erratum

In the last issue of Aquaculture News (No. 32, October 2005) Figure 3 on page 18 was credited erroneously to M. Van Brackel, see

[http://www.aquaculture.stir.ac.uk/AquaNews/32P18\\_20.pdf](http://www.aquaculture.stir.ac.uk/AquaNews/32P18_20.pdf)

We would like to clarify that the map of An Giang Province was originally sourced from UNDP Vietnam.