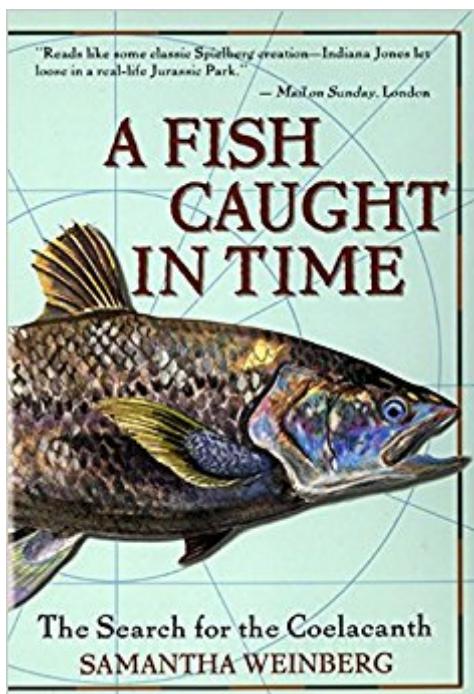


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A Fish Caught In Time: The Search For The Coelacanth



Synopsis

The coelacanth (see-lo-canthal) is no ordinary fish. Five feet long, with luminescent eyes and limb like fins, this bizarre creature, presumed to be extinct, was discovered in 1938 by an amateur ichthyologist who recognized it from fossils dating back 400 million years. The discovery was immediately dubbed the "greatest scientific find of the century," but the excitement that ensued was even more incredible. This is the entrancing story of that most rare and precious fish -- our own great-uncle forty million times removed.

Book Information

Paperback: 220 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial; First Edition edition (February 6, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060932856

ISBN-13: 978-0060932855

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (36 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

"A Fish Caught in Time" is one of those slim books you pick up to read because it sounds somewhat interesting and will add to your volume of knowledge. How can any book about a fish first 'discovered' sixty years ago be really very interesting? Well, it is not only fascinating, it is the kind of book you keep putting down so you won't finish it too fast--this one you don't want to end. Samantha Weinberg chronicles the extremely unlikely sets of coincidences that first led the world to realize there was a living fossil--a fish that had been declared extinct 85 million years ago. The people involved become very human and likeable. Their tenacity and genius as well as their frailties are kindly portrayed. The politics which surrounded collection and examination of further specimens are discussed with tactful realism. The technical scientific study of this incredible fish is presented in an informative and lively way. The reader learns truly fascinating, mind-boggling facts about this fossil in ways that excite the mind. When details about skeletons and DNA hold the lay reader enthralled, it's clear Weinberg has written with passion about her subject. The Coelacanth went from being

understood as an extinct fish found in many fossils to a fish, alive and well, with its organs, skeletal, blood and nerve systems providing incredible and valuable information about the development of the entire animal kingdom that probably couldn't be found any other way. Last but not least, A Fish Caught in Time, different than most 'nature' books does not leave the reader with a sad sense of helplessness. It leaves one with an uplifted sense of awe and with love for this wonderful fish of 100 million years ago.

Samantha Weinberg has written a wonderful book outlining the history of the coelacanth. This "living fossil" fish, which predates the dinosaurs, was believed to have been extinct for millions of years until one was pulled from the sea in 1938. This incredible discovery has been referred to as the "number one zoological find of the twentieth century." The coelacanth, with it's primitive limbs, is a fascinating member of our evolutionary past. Much more than just a fish story, A FISH CAUGHT IN TIME tells an exciting tale of the many individuals involved in expanding our knowledge of the coelacanth--and hopefully preventing it's extinction as we enter the twenty-first century. This is one of those special books that was hard to put down and ended far too soon!

What should you do if you are a fish thought to be extinct for millions of years, and suddenly humans discover you? You should really give some serious thought to finding a better place to hide. Ms. Weinberg tells the exciting story of the 1938 discovery of this rare fish, and the continual efforts to obtain more of them. You immediately develop an affectionate bond with this strange, yet beautiful, creature that hides in rocky caves far from the surface of the ocean. Its fins are almost like limbs; its tail is like that of no other fish; it likes to stand on its head; its babies are born live; it seems to use magnetic fields to find its prey; its brain is the size of a grape. Understandably scientists wanted to see more of these fish on their dissection tables, and to date more than two hundred coelacanths have ended up there. Bounties were established for their capture, and the Japanese wanted to get a live specimen. Fortunately conservationists were reasonably quick in getting regulations established for old "four legs" protection. The fish cannot live in captivity: It overheats in surface temperature water, and the bright sunlight blinds it. It's really sad when a scientist has to state that if the coelacanth prospers in other locations hopefully we won't find them. I experienced some frustration in my reading. As a layman with a strong interest in science I came to tire of the extensive human biographies found in the book, and wanted to learn more about the fish itself. Fortunately there is a 9-page appendix in the back of the book that discusses the anatomy and physiology of the coelacanth. Still there could have been some more accessible science in this

book. On the other hand "A Fish Caught In Time" is an important, necessary work.

I had read an account a few years back about the initial discovery of the coelacanth off the coast of South Africa and the tracking down of its habitat to the waters around Madagascar. It captured my imagination. It was great to find out that the story didn't end with the Madagascar discovery. Upon reading this book, I was thrilled to hear about the confirmation of coelacanths living off Indonesia. The theory put forth in the book that there might be populations in the Philippines or even off the Atlantic coast of the United States stirs the imagination as well. The book is very easy to get thru. It gives you just the right amount of scientific information and includes more human elements, namely the stories of the people involved in discovering, studying and protecting the coelacanth. Something like this definitely makes you wonder. I mean, if a fish that was thought to be extinct for millions of years escaped detection by humanity till the beginning of the twentieth century, what else might still be out there?

Weinberg's book is a fascinating account of the discovery of the most famous "living fossil," the coelacanth (*Latimeria chalumnae*) of the coasts of Africa and Madagascar in the 1930s. But the author does not confine herself to that initial discovery, and includes an account of subsequent finds, as well as an overview of the significance of the coelacanth to evolutionary biology. A wonderfully written book, great for readers of all ages (it might be an ideal book for getting a younger reader interested in science). Weinberg has also included an extensive second appendix, directing those who'd like to see a coelacanth up close to museums that have specimens in their collections.

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