

## Book Review

**The Tilapia Trail. The life story of a fish biologist.** Rosemary Lowe-McConnell. MPM Publishing, Ascot. 2006. 296p. ISBN 0-9545596-4-9.

I am honored in doing this review because Rosemary Lowe-McConnell's publication exerted a strong effect in my early days as a fish enthusiast. In addition, I had opportunity to meet her in Sussex, along with my (and hers) friends Drs. Angelo A. Agostinho and Miguel Petrere Jr. In there, I saw her simplicity and conditions of work, and only a brilliant mind could achieve what she did for Neotropical Ichthyology. But now, back to the book. This publication is not only a scientific book about biology of tilapias but as the subtitle shows, it is the life story (not a history) of one important fish biologist of the last and this century. Black-white and color pictures taken from common people, fisherman, beautiful places, lakes, ponds, fishes and traffic signals (beware of elephants on this road) and the good mood of Ro (as she prefer) make the reading exciting from the cover to the last page.

The initial five chapters are dedicated to the description of Ro's debut as a scientist. Also they describe her first contacts with Africa in 1945, at the end of II World War. (She heard about the Japanese surrender when she was on the train, going to Lake Nyasa, the first lake she studied). The researches in Lake Victoria, lakes George and Edward, Lake Albert, Lake Turkana, Tanganyika and others were presented in chapters three, four and five and involved a great number of researchers. Studies on life cycle, fish feeding, fisheries, life strategies, parental care, kinds of nests, the coexistence of tilapia species and large piscivorous like *Lates* and *Hydrocynus* in some lakes were performed. The scientific nomenclature for new genera and species of tilapias was updated in the book. These chapters show an overview of the main researches conducted by EAFRO (East Africa Fisheries Research Laboratory) staff over more than ten years.

Chapter six: The marriage bar and a new life. In December of 1953 she got married with Richard McConnell and left the service on EAFRO because the marriage bar. Marriage bar meant that married woman could not be employed on a permanent basis in the Public Service. Ro Lowe, now Lowe-McConnell, joined her husband to Kalahari where he was working as a geologist. Between 1957 and 1962 they lived in British Guyana, and she reports her experiences with fishes from the Neotropical region, with small number of cichlids and a great number of species from other groups, absents in Africa. Also she describes the convergence of electric fishes from America and Africa. Her experiences in the Rupununi savannas and other places in Guyana were described in another book (Lowe-McConnell, 2000). Chapter Seven. Home base, Sussex and BMNH. When Richard McConnell retired from the Geological Survey, they returned to England and lived in Sussex. At this time, Ro was working in the Fish Sec-

tion of British Museum of Natural History BM (NH) as Associate. It was a very productive time, resulting in publications of two books, and one of them, translated to Portuguese, the only other language one can find it. The BM, as she wrote, "was an ideal base for meeting people and as a catalyst for ideas and information". From that time up to now, she helped FAO, ICLARM, and others to edit books, and organized symposia, meetings and congresses. Chapter 8: Back to Africa. After the edition of Man-made lakes, Ro turned back to Africa to visit the huge reservoirs mainly in West part of Africa (Lake Kariba and Lake Volta) and revisited some of the Great Lakes, as Lake Malawi and Lake Victoria, now impacted with the introduction of *Lates niloticus*.

Chapter 9: South America revisited. Ro spent two months, between April and May of 1968) in the Roncador expedition with scientists from UK, invited by the Brazilian government. At Mato Grosso State, she worked in rios Suiá Missu, Xingú, and rio das Mortes in the rio Araguaia basin. Her reports include not only the fishes (especially catfishes and gymnotoids), but also her impressions about the great number of birds, insects and plants and the nice "brasileros". The data about this field trip was published 23 years later. (Lowe-McConnell, 1991). In 1979 she went to Gatun Lake in Panamá where Thomas Zaret was studying the impact of the introduced species *Cichla ocellaris*. Em 1995 Ro McConnell turned back to Brazil during the International Society of Limnology meeting at S. Paulo. In this trip she also visited Manaus, Foz do Iguacu and met her Brazilian friends, many of them had already visited her in Sussex.

The last chapter was dedicated to aquatic chicken as *Tilapia*, *Oreochromis* and others genera. She discuss the importance of these fishes as a source of food, mainly in poor countries; the current distribution of species of tilapia all over the world and finish the text hoping that the book will give an idea of how our present knowledge was obtained. References are listed in alphabetical order for each chapter at the end of the book. A list of publications of R. Lowe-McConnell in a chronologic order, gives us an overview about the life story of a fish biologist. As she said in 1997, when receiving the Linnean Medal of Zoology and cited in the book "Not bad for someone who hasn't had a job since 1953!"

### Literature Cited

- Lowe-McConnell, R. H. 1991. Natural history of fishes in Araguaia and Xingu Amazonian tributaries. Serra do Roncador, Mato Grosso, Brazil. Ichthyological Exploration of Freshwaters 2:63-82.
- Lowe-McConnell, R. H. 2000. Land of waters: Explorations in the Natural History of Guyana, South America. The Book Guild, Lewes, Sussex. 289p.

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