



Swordfish: A Biography of the Ocean Gladiator

Richard Ellis

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A perfect fish in the evolutionary sense, the broadbill swordfish derives its name from its distinctive bill—much longer and wider than the bill of any other billfish—which is flattened into the sword we all recognize. And though the majesty and allure of this warrior fish has commanded much attention—from adventurous sportfishers eager to land one to ravenous diners eager to taste one—no one has yet been bold enough to truly take on the swordfish as a biographer. Who better to do so than Richard Ellis, a master of marine natural history? *Swordfish: A Biography of the Ocean Gladiator* is his masterly ode to this mighty fighter.

The swordfish, whose scientific name means “gladiator,” can take on anyone and anything, including ships, boats, sharks, submarines, divers, and whales, and in this book Ellis regales us with tales of its vitality and strength. Ellis makes it easy to understand why it has inspired so many to take up the challenge of epic sportfishing battles as well as the longline fishing expeditions recounted by writers such as Linda Greenlaw and Sebastian Junger. Ellis shows us how the bill is used for defense—contrary to popular opinion it is not used to spear prey, but to slash and debilitate, like a skillful saber fencer. Swordfish, he explains, hunt at the surface as well as thousands of feet down in the depths, and like tuna and some sharks, have an unusual circulatory system that gives them a significant advantage over their prey, no matter the depth in which they hunt. Their adaptability enables them to swim in waters the world over—tropical, temperate, and sometimes cold—and the largest ever caught on rod and reel was landed in Chile in 1953, weighing in at 1,182 pounds (and this heavyweight fighter, like all the largest swordfish, was a female).

Ellis’s detailed and fascinating, fact-filled biography takes us behind the swordfish’s huge, cornflower-blue eyes and provides a complete history of the fish from prehistoric fossils to its present-day endangerment, as our taste for swordfish has had a drastic effect on their population the world over. Throughout, the book is graced with many of Ellis’s own drawings and paintings, which capture the allure of the fish and bring its splendor and power to life for armchair fishermen and landlocked readers alike.

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