Charismatic Krill? Size and Conservation in the Ocean

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Abstract:

The open ocean is an alien place for human beings and for most of history it has been studied using very indirect means. A great deal of what we know about animals that live on land, from ants to elephants, is based on centuries of direct natural history observations of animals alive and in situ. There is no such body of observation of marine animals. Most of what we know about animals in the ocean comes from studying dead animals, collected in nets towed through ocean depths that we can rarely observe. Marine biological knowledge is flavored by the material we have to work with and this, in turn, is affected by the terminology that early scientists used in an attempt to describe the strange world that their nets revealed. Despite the recent development of more sophisticated ways of investigating the ocean, many marine scientists continue to adopt nineteenth-century terminology and approaches (such as the use of the term zooplankton and the use of plankton nets), and this colors interpretation of the results of oceanographic studies. Using Antarctic krill *Euphausia superba* as an example, we suggest that the perception amongst both scientists and the general public of krill's small size, passivity, and lack of individuality has led to their being treated less like animals themselves than as background habitat for other animals. Because krill have such a central role in the Antarctic ecosystem and are the subject of a large fishery, these assumptions may have serious consequences for krill themselves and the conservation of the Antarctic region as a whole.

Keywords: ANTARCTICA; CHARISMA; CONSERVATION; KRILL; MARINE BIOLOGY; SIZE

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