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Captured on paper: fish books, natural history and questions of demarcation in eighteenth-century Europe (ca. 1680-1820)

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PROPOSITIONS

accompanying the PhD dissertation

Captured on Paper: Fish Books, Natural History and Questions of Demarcation in Eighteenth-Century Europe (ca. 1680–1820)

1. Rather than take present-day disciplinary categories for granted when studying knowledge of the past, historians should turn to the continuous process in which historical actors themselves delineate their own subjects and methods.
2. Although Willughby and Ray claimed to have developed a novel approach to the study of nature, their books did not constitute a complete break with the works of earlier Renaissance authors.
3. That Willughby, Ray and the other Fellows continually sought out the experiences of fishermen and fishmongers proves that the Royal Society did not restrict authority and credibility to gentleman scholars – contrary to the narrative of the Society as a closed circle.
4. A classification system does not only demarcate species from one another, but also demarcates (allegedly) relevant from (allegedly) irrelevant knowledge. Artedi's *Ichthyologia* should thus be read as a programmatic attempt to establish the study of fish as a field in and of itself and to place its author in the middle.
5. As the case of Bloch shows, whilst rarely travelling one could become a recognized authority on the world's known fish by amassing an expansive collection and converting said collection into a printed, paper museum.
6. The phrase "drawn from the life" takes on special significance in the case of fish, the perishable qualities of which posed both practical and epistemological challenges to artists and naturalists throughout the early modern period.
7. To place sole focus on well-known naturalists is to flatten a vibrant, rich culture in which people from various backgrounds applied themselves to the study of nature.
8. In studying the history of natural history, visits to a fresh produce market can sometimes prove more illuminating than perusing books.
9. Historians are well positioned to and should contribute more to long-term biodiversity research because of their aptitude in transcribing and interpreting species descriptions from the past.
10. Due to continuous budget cuts in academia, attracting a wealthy spouse seems once again advisable when pursuing a career in research.
11. There is no such thing as a fish.