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Nebraska's Nature Compendium

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NEBRASKA'S NATURE COMPENDIUM

The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity. Paul A. Johnsgard. 2001. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 402 pages. \$29.95 (cloth).

With attrition claiming many academic organismal biologists, and many institutions failing to replace them, it can be difficult for natural history novices to obtain basic information for broad geographic areas. Johnsgard conceived *The Nature of Nebraska* in response to a tenacious teacher and the needs of her fourth-grade class in Elwood, Nebraska. This book will help fill the need for persons, especially teachers, struggling to find basic information on Nebraska's natural history and guidance in natural history education.

Divided almost equally into two parts, text and appendices, the opening section describes Nebraska's geologic past and landscape formation, as well as the biological communities and their fit into ecoregions. Having set the stage for Nebraska's natural history, Johnsgard proceeds in separate chapters to describe Nebraska's nine ecological regions and biological communities. Each begins with the description and map of an area, major influences, and descriptions of community types. Chapters also include "Profiles of Keystone and Typical Species" and "Vignettes of Endangered and Declining Species", emphasizing a few species, including natural history details and response to settlement. This arrangement will work well for educators wanting to narrow classroom efforts to certain topics. They can choose the big picture, smaller community types, keystone species, or endangered species, each able to generate study and discussion in classrooms.

Johnsgard's own line drawings, maps, charts, and tables of information generously illustrate the text. Color photographs or illustrations, especially of habitat types, would have aided readers in visualizing some areas. The text is sprinkled with Johnsgard's opinions of settlement, farm politics, habitat destruction, hunting, etc. While I disagree with several opinions, I do believe that their presence enhances the book's classroom use by showing differences of opinion and opening discussion about past, present, and future conservation responsibilities of our society. Appendices include checklists of Nebraska's flora and fauna, guides to natural areas, indices to two popular Nebraska publications, a glossary, and references.

Some errors include the mixed use of the common names "red squirrel" and "fox squirrel" in the fox squirrel section (page 147); red squirrels do not occur in Nebraska. Nebraska has three species of sturgeon (page 169), not two, with the shovelnose sturgeon omitted. Figure 50 (page 172) has black-nose and Topeka shiner reversed. Page 190 should read "Prairie Plains Resource Institute." The complete omission of consumptive-based wildlife organizations among groups contributing to wildlife and habitat conservation in Nebraska, though their wildlife

management areas and refuges are in the appendices, will alienate some readers.

The benefits outweigh the drawbacks, however, and this book will be a valuable addition to school library shelves in Nebraska and areas of bordering states.--*Thomas E. Lapedz, Division of Zoology, University of Nebraska State Museum, Lincoln, NE 68588-0514.*