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Birds of the Platte

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BIRDS OF THE PLATTE

Birding Crane River: Nebraska's Platte. Gary R. Lingle. 1994. Harrier Publishing, Grand Island, NE. 121 pages. \$11.95 (paper).

Gary Lingle has done an outstanding job compiling information to make birding the Central Platte River and Rainwater Basin area of Nebraska easier and more rewarding. The book was not designed to replace a field guide. Rather, it provides maps, general information about the area, when and where birds can be seen, and likelihood of viewing each of 300 bird species possible. Sprinkled throughout the book are drawings by William S. Whitney and Ernest V. Ochsner that depict the structural simplicity of the prairie and the diversity of its wildlife. The writing style is personal and unpretentious, and the text offers many insights that will make birding more fun.

This book, with its spiral binding, will withstand vigorous page turning. At 6 by 8.5 inches, it fits in a knapsack or large fannypack. Detailed fold-out maps depict the seven counties covered by this guide. The back cover also folds out to support opened maps. The print on these maps is rather small so as to include all details that prevent one from getting lost and to allow one to explore areas away from highways. Unfortunately, a key to symbols on the fold-out maps is not provided.

The book first presents information on biogeography, geology and hydrology, weather, how man has transformed habitats in the area, and assurance that many and varied dining establishments, hotels, and campgrounds are in the area. Brief lists of arthropod and plant pests include when and where each may be encountered and how they can be avoided. The American Birding Association's Code of Ethics and five points of crane-watching etiquette are also included.

The next section points out birding hotspots on maps, describes how to get to them, and lists species likely to be encountered. Be sure to visit the Taylor Ranch, Crane Meadows, Shoemaker Road, Hall County Park, and Bader Memorial Park. Be especially careful on any road with a "minimum maintenance" sign; these roads can be extremely treacherous when wet.

"Specialties of the Region" presents detail on local natural history of selected birds, such as sandhill cranes, waterfowl, threatened and endangered species, prairie species, and raptors.

A checklist of 300 bird species mentions months each species may be present, whether individuals nest in the area, and a subjective ranking of observability. The observability rank indicates the likelihood of spotting a species in the right habitat at the right time of year and does not indicate abundance.

A list of 11 local land management organizations that can provide information for planning a trip is at the back of the book. Checklists of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians of the area are also provided.

I wish this guide had been available when I lived in Nebraska. It will be my constant companion when I return to the region.—*Eileen M. Kirsch, National Biological Service, Upper Mississippi Science Center, La Crosse, WI, 54602.*