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Book Review

Grouse of the Plains and Mountains – The South Dakota Story. Lester D. Flake, John W. Connelly, Thomas R. Kirschenmann, and Andrew J. Lindbloom. 2010. South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks, Pierre, South Dakota. 246 pages. \$15.00 (paper). ISBN: 978-0615350158.

Grouse are a fascinating group of birds that offer elaborate breeding displays for birders in the spring, provide sporting opportunities for hunters in the fall, and serve as indicators of grassland health. Though the authors claim that the book targets those who enjoy the outdoors, bird watching, and upland game bird hunting, there is ample reason for ecologists, ornithologists, and grouse researchers to reference this book as well. The book contains general information of interest to a broad audience, but often moves beyond the introductory information to greater detail. Many details are supported by peer-reviewed literature. This book strikes a pleasant balance between dry scientific literature and a coffee table book of intriguing photos. It remains informative while trading painfully formal language for the more conversational tone of popular literature.

The book discusses the four native grouse species that occur in South Dakota: ruffed grouse, greater sage-grouse, greater prairie-chicken, and sharp-tailed grouse. The text is well organized into 13 chapters, followed by appendices and the literature cited. Chapters cover South Dakota's grouse habitats, physical characteristics of the four species (including gender and age determination), behavior, population ecology, habitat use, monitoring, hunting, and habitat conservation.

The book is expertly illustrated with high-quality photographs, tables, graphs, and maps. Each illustration has carefully worded captions or headings such that the entire collection of figures could form a book of their own and remain useful. There are photos on nearly every page. The photos feature subjects that seldom appear in other literature, including those of young grouse chicks, crop contents, close-up views of characteristics that aid in determination of age and gender, and landscape shots that adeptly illustrate grouse habitat. Photos that illustrate research techniques (e.g., vegetation sampling, capturing grouse) and field observations (e.g., shells from a clutch of hatched eggs) will prove interesting to a wide audience.

Few states have made their grouse population survey data so readily available. Lay persons may find the tables of population statistics unappealing but their inclusion as appendices is appropriate. These appendices contain lek

survey data, brood survey data, and fall juvenile:adult ratios from hunter-killed birds. These data will be of interest to upland game or grassland bird biologists in other regions and also to researchers interested in comparative data for trend analyses.

The greatest positive attribute of this book, the photos, could actually lead to a minor criticism. Those who best absorb or, most enjoy, written material may actually find the numerous illustrations distracting. I admit it was difficult to maintain focus on the text when there were three or more stunning images on opposing pages. As I first leafed through the text, a particular habitat photo caught my eye. I had hoped to relocate it based on key text that I recalled from the caption but discovered the book has no index—it's greatest downfall.

The authors acknowledge the benefits of maintaining ranching operations versus converting grasslands to other land uses. Considerable space is then devoted to criticizing grazing practices. In many cases, grazing is inarguably too intensive to provide adequate nesting cover for prairie grouse or sage-grouse. However, few examples of "good" grazing management practices are provided and only brief descriptions of rotational grazing systems are mentioned. Suggestions for stocking rates and a few illustrations of rotations and grazing seasons would have given the reader a better understanding of how livestock and grouse can co-exist.

In summary, this is an excellent and easily read reference for the four grouse species that the book covers. The breadth of information is well balanced with the level of detail, and the general information is not so general as to be hopelessly frustrating to the more educated reader. It is an attractive and enjoyable book that can be read casually or with a careful eye for detail. It will bolster appreciation for grouse and has increased my interest in South Dakota's grouse habitats. This book should be required reading for any upland gamebird hunter who pursues grouse. I encourage budding (pun intended) grouse researchers to read it thoroughly as part of their introduction to grouse ecology. Much of the information presented is specific to South Dakota, but species biology and concepts regarding habitat and conservation make this book applicable to much of the West and the Great Plains. This book is very well done, bargain priced, and available from the SDGFP web site. It will be enjoyed by upland game hunters, biologists, and grassland ecologists who may count themselves as grouse enthusiasts after reading this book.—*Brent E. Jamison, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Medicine Lake, MT 59247.*