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Review of *Great Plains Birds*, by Larkin Powell

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GREAT PLAINS BIRDS.

Larkin Powell. 2019. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA. 224 pages. \$16.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-1-4962-0418-9.

Biologists who live in the Great Plains of North America know well the general aspersion cast toward our regional home by those unfamiliar with the region and its natural treasures. Larkin Powell alludes to this all-too-common aspersion and diplomatically dispels it in his ornithological showcase of the Great Plains, simply titled *Great Plains Birds*. The book is a nice, quick read and a well-composed profile of the region's avian biogeographical history, its disruptions, conservation remedies, examples of basic bird biology, and tips on how to enjoy the bird life on display in this dynamic region.

Having been an ornithologist and birder in the greater Great Plains region for many years, upon receiving the book, I was mildly interested in the title, thinking of what the work might offer to birders from afar visiting the Great Plains, and perhaps other outdoor enthusiasts. I was pleased to find that Powell does a fine job of catching and maintaining interest (even for my old bird brain) with his light-hearted prose and personal reflections on becoming enchanted with birds of the midcontinent. I expect his approach to be accessible by youngsters (importantly!), layman naturalists, and bird fanciers among the general public, and the book should maintain the interest of diehard birders. For the few of us academic and conservation professionals who digest bird science, it was nice to see profiles of research by fellow ornithologists in the region presented in a popular literature-style format outside of peer-reviewed scientific journals.

While highlighting the many blights of modern civilization on the natural world as a result of our expanding human population and its agricultural industry, Powell is pragmatic in putting the lives of agricultural producers in the broader context of surviving in the dynamic environment of the Great Plains. Incentives are at play that drive human decisions. Those incentives are economically driven as well as shaped by our conservation ethic, which we all share at some basic level. Regretful decisions by society are made and can be undone, if only in part, by restoring habitat and its wildlife dependents. Powell reminds us that landowners are key in this decision-making process.

In addition to modern human connections to the landscape and its birds, Powell reaches farther back to Native American relationships with Great Plains avifauna. Aboriginal connections with large mammals (principally American Bison [*Bison bison*]) dominate our perspectives of times predating modern industrial settlement in the Great Plains. However, there also remains an oral history of Native American fascination with birds—a fascination common to all humankind. Many delightful stories, or legends, associated with this history are shared with the reader, mostly through quoted passages from the region's native inhabitants.

Perhaps most satisfying for me as an ornithology professor is that Powell's book parallels much of the ornithology course that I—and others, via standard ornithology texts—teach using our Great Plains avifauna as exemplary subjects. *Great Plains Birds* covers aspects of bird evolution, biogeographic history (including deep geological history that affected it), sexual selection of mating displays, migration ecology, and a tour of avian taxonomic groups. I am strongly considering this text as required reading for my future ornithology courses so the students can relate what we generally teach about birds to the interesting critters flying around in their own geographical neighborhood.

Potential criticisms are few. One could disparage the anthropomorphisms that Powell uses in describing bird behaviors (e.g., assumptions about the thoughts of birds), but I, for one, find these sorts of illustrations useful metaphors for pondering why birds might be reacting as they do and why these behaviors—and avian capacity for learning—have been inherited and evolutionarily preserved. Other than that, a few typos were distracting (of which we all are guilty), but those errors ultimately lie with the publisher.

Great Plains Birds ends with a guide for birders and nature enthusiasts to some birding hotspots across the Great Plains, including bird communities of grasslands, wetlands, and woodlands. Powell also reminds us of birding ethics—it is important that all birders understand the ethics of birding and practice these principles in the field! I expect this book will be of interest to students, birders, and anyone who is fascinated by birds (which should include just about everyone!), including those of us residing in 'flyover country' and visitors alike.—William E. Jensen, Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Emporia State University, Box 4050, 1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, Kansas 66801-5415, USA.