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Review of *Gatherings of Angels: Migrating Birds and Their Ecology* Edited by Kenneth P. Able

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Gatherings of Angels: Migrating Birds and Their Ecology. Edited by Kenneth P. Able. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. xi+193 pp. Maps, notes, references, index. \$29.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8014-3362-2).

Who among us has not marveled at the mystery of bird migration? I know the sights and sounds of vast skeins of geese plying northward, or the kettles of cranes or raptors floating on thermals across the prairie skies, or

even the sudden appearance of gaudily clad Baltimore orioles or bobolinks in the spring still quicken my pulse. How do they navigate across the vast expanses of the globe? What cues tell them when it's time to begin their treks? And, more fundamentally, why *do* birds migrate? These are simply a few of the myriad questions surrounding this natural phenomenon.

"Angels" was the term used by early radar operators to indicate the echoes produced by birds and other unknown targets on their screens, hence the book's title. Author-editor Kenneth Able called upon eight bird migration experts to share their knowledge and expertise in this ten-chapter volume. Each chapter delves into a particular aspect of migration and stands alone. While much has been written about the importance of nesting and wintering habitat, this book points out the critical importance of migration habitat. Topics range from the month-long staging of sandhill cranes along the Platte River to the compressed broad-wing flights at Hawk Mountain, and from the transoceanic jaunts of white-rumped sandpipers and blackpoll warblers to the migration strategies used by rufous hummingbirds in the Rocky Mountains and western sandpipers along the Pacific Coast and Copper River Delta.

Gatherings of Angels elucidates the technological advances that have enabled researchers to investigate aspects of migration that could only be speculated upon previously. Most notable has been the refinement of radar images depicting images of migrating birds and the advent of satellite telemetry making it possible to follow an individual bird throughout its annual cycle. These developments have opened entirely new arenas for investigation. It is now feasible to pinpoint key migration habitat areas or to follow the precise migratory pathway of a bird. Whether this information will make us better stewards of our migratory bird resource remains to be seen.

Undoubtedly, one of the most daunting tasks faced by the editor was how to reduce the massive literature on bird migration to a single volume. Some readers may feel slighted by the omission of a pet project; but by and large Kenneth Able has put together a valuable book, one that should be enjoyed by a wide variety of readers, experts and novices alike. In an epilogue, he presents a compelling argument for his readers to rise to the conservation challenges presented by migratory birds. There is no question that the next time I witness the silhouettes of a migrating bird against a full moon, I will be more awe-struck than ever. **Gary R. Lingle**, *Platte Watershed Program Coordinator, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Kearney*.