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Review of Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy

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Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy. By John L. Zimmerman. Foreword by Jan Garton. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990. Illustrations, bibliography, appendices, index. xvi + 197 pp. \$19.95.

Millions of years ago earth crust movements caused a sixty-four-square mile area near what is now Great Bend in central Kansas to drop, creating a shallow, poorly drained basin. These wetlands, called Cheyenne Bottoms, draw hordes of waterfowl and shorebirds during spring and fall migrations. Its importance is such that it is considered one of the three major stop-over places for shorebirds east of the Rockies, "an oasis in a parched and wind seared landscape beckoning the greatest travelers on the globe."

Zimmerman, an ornithologist and professor of biology at Kansas State University, explains in graphic detail many examples of food chains that exist in this shallow water and mud flat environment and that make it so attractive for a shorebird stopover. Along with the plentiful bird life that feeds on the invertebrates come the predators and scavengers, from peregrine falcons and horned owls of the air to the mink, snakes, and snapping turtles of the water and mud flats. All are interwoven into the complex life system of this marsh. The terminology used by the author makes it helpful if the reader has at least a basic knowledge of biological science.

The appendices list both common and scientific names of the hundreds of plants, birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles that have been documented at Cheyenne Bottoms.

An "oasis" requires water, either flowing into it or seeping into it from below. The upstream diversion of water from the nearby Arkansas River and other streams, plus the lowering of the Ogallala Aquifer due to the drilling of many nearby irrigation wells, intensifies the problem of maintaining this wetland.

Starting in the early 1980s there was a sudden realization that Cheyenne Bottoms was drying up and how endangered was this unique and important wildlife haven. Conservation organizations throughout Kansas joined forces to publicize the plight of the bottoms, not only to the public but also to the Kansas legislature. A twenty-five-year restoration plan is currently under development.

More people need to be made aware of the value of wetlands to help counter the recent trend by some farmers and developers to try to weaken wetland protection laws. *Cheyenne Bottoms* not only tells us the value of the wetlands but also tests some of the processes which can be used in their preservation.

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