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Review of *Weeds of the Great Plains* by James Stubbendieck, Mitchell 1. Coffin, and L. M. Landholt

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Weeds of the Great Plains. By James Stubbendieck, Mitchell J. Coffin, and L. M. Landholt. Lincoln: Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 2003. xiv + 605 pp. Maps, photographs, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. \$25.00 cloth.

Alteration of the Great Plains landscape during the past two centuries has permitted scores of weedy plants to flourish and expand their ranges, often profoundly affecting the ecology and economy of the region. As their numbers have increased, weed identification has become progressively more challenging. More than 600 of the 3,600 species of flowering plants and ferns documented in the Great Plains were not here 200 years ago. This book, updating and replacing *Weeds of Nebraska and the Great Plains* (1994), intends to enable users to “identify or confirm the identity of the most important weeds in the Great Plains.”

In a handsome, hardbound edition, *Weeds of the Great Plains* provides detailed descriptions for more than 400 weed species. Richly illustrated with 266 line drawings and over 600 color photographs, its graphics are superior in quality to those of most weed guides. Basic nomenclature and morphology are covered in the introduction. Technical terms are kept to a minimum, descriptions are concise, and a glossary is provided, enhanced by the introduction’s illustrations. Distribution, uses, toxicity, and other attributes are also described. Species are arranged alphabetically by family and by scientific name within each family.

Information for each species is presented in a functional, two-page layout: a full-page photograph of the plant; text, an illustration, and one or two smaller photos highlighting flowers, seedlings, or other diagnostic characteristics on the facing page. The book is not as geographically limited as one might guess from its title, since many of the species included are cosmopolitan weeds encountered outside the Great Plains.

The book is not without problems. In broaching the question of what makes a plant a weed, the authors conclude a useful definition is “a plant that interferes

with management objectives for an area at a given point in time.” While the book’s utilitarian purpose is clear, I often wondered about the biological, cultural, economic, and geographic factors that caused some species to be included. Exotics make up roughly one-quarter of the species treated, but are not always clearly distinguished from native species—information often useful to ranchers and land managers. No keys or finding lists are provided. Because identifications involve leafing through 600-plus pages, the volume seems best suited for confirming tentative judgments. Distribution statements are not ordered intuitively, and illustrations and photos sometimes show identical features. Typos, photo misidentifications, and formatting inconsistencies, however, are infrequent.

Weeds of the Great Plains is a solid, reputable piece of work. Used alone or in concert with other plant and weed identification guides, it should be tremendously valuable to land managers, ranchers and farmers, conservationists, and botanists who live or work in the Great Plains. And at \$25.00 per copy, which includes postage and handling, it’s a steal. **Craig C. Freeman**, *R. L. McGregor Herbarium, Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center, University of Kansas*.