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Book Review: *The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots* By Bob Gress and Pete Janzen

William E. Jensen
Emporia State University

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The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots. By Bob Gress and Pete Janzen. Foreword by Kenn Kaufman. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008. xiv + 354 pp. Photographs, references, index. \$19.95 paper.

Some newcomers to—or even long-time residents of—Kansas (or the Great Plains in general) need an inspirational introduction to the wonderful natural history offered by midcontinental North America. *The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots* by Bob Gress and Pete Janzen accomplishes such an introduction. Though photographic bird guides have their limitations

in illustrating plumage variation, the outstanding color photographs by Gress are exceptionally sharp, colorful, and do well in depicting field marks with frame-filling views of each species profiled. The photos are vast improvements over any preceding bird guide specific to Kansas (e.g., Thompson and Ely, *Birds in Kansas*, 2 vols., 1989-1992), and the updated birding tips and “hot spot” descriptions surpass the earlier contribution by Zimmerman and Patti (*A Guide to Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri*, 1988).

The book is generally well organized and informative. The foreword by Kenn Kaufman, renowned field guide author and native Kansan, highlights the appealing diversity of Kansas avifauna. The introduction by Gress and Janzen significantly notes the general usefulness of the book for neophyte and advanced birders alike. The species profiles are not taxonomically organized, but rather are grouped into seemingly recognizable categories of taxonomic common names or various behavioral or morphological attributes. Such categories should be useful for the novice birder, though some might be mildly misleading (e.g., a separate category for “Colorful Songbirds” that are presumably distinct from “Warblers”). The “Birding Basics” chapter is especially useful for the novice birder. The chapter on “Kansas Geography and Ecosystems” is informative, though the avifaunal biogeography of the state’s central continental position and many ecoregions could be a bit more detailed.

I enjoyed the “Calendar of Kansas Bird Activity” chapter as birds are prominent harbingers of seasonal change. I have often paged through my own mental calendar of bird activity as the months and seasons change. The species profiles hit the important points: field identification tips, habitats and distribution, seasonal occurrence, and miscellaneous field notes including “hot spots” where species are most likely to be found. I suppose the only mild complaint I have with the species profiles is the inconsistent presentation of vocalization characteristics, especially for the songbirds (though such written descriptions are obviously inferior to reference recordings, which are noted as being commercially available in the “Birding Basics” chapter). The numbered and alphabetical list of sites on the map of “Kansas Birding Hot Spots” does not correspond to the order of preceding “hot spot” descriptions, but the descriptions are aptly detailed with notable species occurrences and directions to the sites. The “Birding Resources” chapter and appended checklist are also pleasing components of this guide.

Together with Gress’s Pocket Guide series for other Kansas wildlife (published by the Friends of the Great

Plains Nature Center), *The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots* will prove a useful addition to your home or rolling library of Kansas’s natural history. **William E. Jensen**, *Department of Biological Sciences, Emporia State University*.