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Book Review [of *At Home and at Large in the Great Plains: Essays and Memories*]

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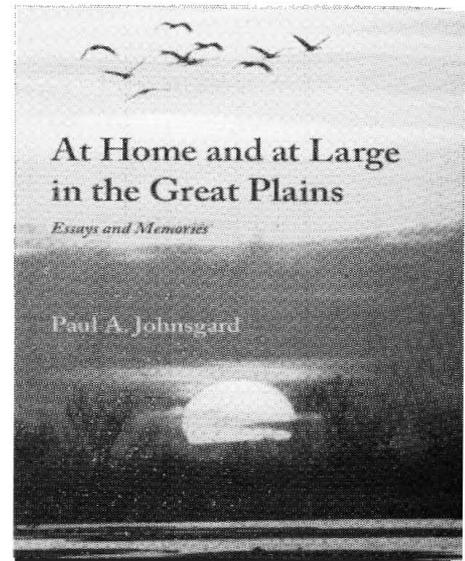
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At Home and at Large in the Great Plains Essays and Memories

Paul A. Johnsgard

Reviewed by Janis Paseka

Nebraska birders may remember reading some of the 14 essays published in this book, since they appeared previously in *Prairie Fire*, the monthly Great Plains public policy newspaper. Topics of the short and engaging essays range from changing bird life to outstanding birding areas to conservation in the Great Plains. We read about sediment deposits, the “gifts of glaciers past”, which were left by retreating rivers of ice thousands of years ago and resulted in the creation of the prairie potholes so important now to our waterfowl and wading birds. One essay marvels at the variety of animal skeletons, including a saber-toothed deer, found at Ashfall Fossil Beds. Another chronicles the author’s observations of the hatching of a chick of the greater race of Sandhill Cranes which breed in the mountain meadows of far western Wyoming. Johnsgard describes the new crane as “a beautiful coppery-gold chick, as shiny as a newly minted penny”.



Also included is an informal autobiography, an earlier version of which appeared in 2010 in the *Nebraska Bird Review*. We read about his childhood along the Red River in North Dakota, his research at Cornell University and the Wildfowl Trust in England, and his acceptance in 1961 of a teaching position at the University of Nebraska, described by his mentor as “not a bad place from which to look for another job”. But Johnsgard “fell in love with Nebraska from the very beginning” and stayed. He describes being reluctantly nudged into teaching a summer ornithology class at the University of Nebraska’s Cedar Point Biological Station just east of Lake McConaughy. He had never been there before and considered a temporary relocation to western Nebraska as an unwelcome interruption to his planned summer writing. When he arrived and drove down into the junipers and cottonwoods surrounding the facility, however, he heard Rock Wrens and Black-billed Magpies, and a Great-Horned Owl took off before him from a rocky promontory. He felt like he “had suddenly been transported to a magical place”. He went back to teach there for 16 of the following 17 summers, and his writing did not suffer, as he is the author of more than 80 books and many more articles. A list of all his published works appears at the end of the book.

The book is available from Zea Books, Lincoln NE, and in electronic form on <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/zeabook/30/>.