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Review of *Field of Vision* By Lisa Knopp

Donald B. Cunningham
NEBRASKAland Magazine

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to inform and engage far outweigh them and reinforce her declaration in the concluding essay of the collection that "vision is not simply the end product of sensation, as some would have it. Rather it is the beginning of interpretation."

DONALD B. CUNNINGHAM
Editor, NEBRASKAland Magazine

Field of Vision. By Lisa Knopp. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996. xiv + 139 pp. \$14.95 paper.

In *Field of Vision*, Lisa Knopp, like many nature essayists, explores and explicates both interior and exterior landscapes; unlike many less skillful writers, she negotiates the difficult terrain between the two, with its uncertain borders, tangled undergrowth, and hidden precipices, with delicate balance and a sure step. The sixteen essays in the collection, written between 1989 and 1995, range over a wide variety of subjects—a possum's tail, a heron's eye, the plover's name, a cricket's chirp, the crumpled wings of the mayfly nymph—but share a common theme: the naturalist's search for the boundary—or for some assurance that there is no boundary—between nature and self.

Knopp is a literary naturalist in the best sense: philosophical but concrete, contemplative but unsentimental, serious but not somber, inward looking but not self-absorbed. Her study of nature, as these essays reveal it, grows out of keen observation and a curiosity that leads her first out into a marsh, then back into the library. Although she is as likely to draw inspiration from a poet or anthropologist as from a botanist or entomologist, the essays are solidly grounded in natural science, and the evidence of her scientific reading is always present. The additional insights—the other ways of seeing—that come from writers like Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Jackson Turner, Joyce Carol Oates, and Leslie Marmon Silko enrich and enliven her writing.

The essays are least effective when Knopp must strain to make the outer world a metaphor for an inner condition. Those moments are rare, however, and her consistent ability