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August 1992

Review of *Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy* by John L. Zimmerman

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Janovy, John, "Review of *Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy* by John L. Zimmerman" (1992). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 122.
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Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy. John L. Zimmerman. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990. xvi + 197 pp. Map, drawings, photos, and references. \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0-7006-0443-X).

The Cheyenne Bottoms, Barton County, Kansas, has long been hallowed ground for birders and scientists as well as hunters. The dikes let one drive slowly through the marshes, scanning the flats for favorite sandpiper species and experiencing first hand the isolation of the central Kansas prairies. John Zimmerman, professor of biology at Kansas State University, had captured the Cheyenne Bottoms aura in eloquent prose, giving us a taste of wetlands natural history, while bringing to life the political and economic conflicts surrounding Arkansas River, and Walnut Creek, water. In many ways, the Cheyenne Bottoms case is a modern archetypical prairie fight between irrigators and environmentalists. Zimmerman succeeds admirably in his effort to lay out, in plain language, the issues, politics, and actions that dictate the fate of this enormous wetland. And if there is any take home message from this book, it is to be found in the blunt reporting of Jan Garton's introduction: "Never before in Kansas history had taxpayers' dollars gone for wildlife needs." Zimmerman has done a superb job of translating biological argot into lay terms, extracting the underlying ecological principles and illustrating them with easily understood examples, interpreting the seemingly neutral numbers, letting us see the natural drama usually reserved for the scientifically literate, and showing us the ultimate link between the microscopic lower levels of a food web and the annual economic impact of bird watchers on Barton County (four times that of pheasant and duck hunters combined). Central to Zimmerman's success is his skillful use of basic science, especially the ecological studies of Wayne Hoffman, and the weaving of the Hoffman observations into the narrative. If, after reading this book, a legislator cannot understand the fundamentals of ecology well enough to make a reasoned decision on natural resource management, then that politician should be defeated in the next election.

Zimmerman also has a gift for quickly transporting a reader into the world of field biology with very few words ("Summer is heron time. . . . Late summer is dying time . . . now is a time for the unusual . . . the lone Sabine's gull."). His literary summations of biological principles are instantly understood and remembered ("Cheyenne Bottoms, like all marshes, is a system that lives on decay."). And, his writing skills are not reserved for wild animals; his "channels made straight by misguided technocrats" is a classic condemnation

of scientific ineptness in high places. In summary, *Cheyenne Bottoms* is not only a great read, it is an important one. **John Janovy, Jr.**, *School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.