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Review of *Faces of the Great Plains: Prairie Wildlife* Photographs and field notes by Bob Gress, text by Paul A. Johnsgard

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Faces of the Great Plains: Prairie Wildlife. Photographs and field notes by Bob Gress, text by Paul A. Johnsgard. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. xii + 170 pp. Photographs, map, field notes, index, photo information. \$34.95 cloth.

Bob Gress, director of the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita, provides an extraordinary set of photographs for this coffee-table book. The text is by Paul Johnsgard, emeritus professor of biology and the author of more than forty books. A color map on page xiv showing the distributions of grassland types follows the recent trend toward limiting the shortgrass prairies to regions south of the Nebraska-South Dakota state line. The opening sentence defies the common perception of the Great Plains as simply “flyover” country and sets the tone for the text: “Few geographic regions of North America offer a greater capacity for the imagination to run free rein than the Great Plains.”

Organization is mainly by biome type, including tallgrass prairie, mixed-grass prairie, shortgrass prairie, sandhills grasslands, arid shrubsteppes, riverine and upland forests, and Plains wetlands. The biome sections are followed by others on vertebrate species that thrive in the presence of modern human activity (“The Wildlife Around Us”) and long-distance migrants (“The Transients: Migrant and Drifter”). Within each section are photos of wildlife and accompanying text, plus “field notes”—descriptions of some of Gress’s experiences taking photographs.

This is clearly not a comprehensive account of vertebrate species native to the Great Plains. Of the roughly 600 species native to the region, by my count there are photographs of only 145. There is a bias in favor of birds, 93 species of which are featured, along with 33 mammals, 14 reptiles, and 5 amphibians.

The book's main theme seems to be appreciation for Great Plains wildlife. Conservation needs appear throughout, though they are subdued and subtle. Gress's photographs are razor-sharp; the lighting is exceptionally favorable. Many of the subjects are small, adding to the challenge, but the results are well above average for coffee-table books. As expected, Johnsgard's writing is clear, crisp, and at times poetic, making for a winning combination. **James H. Shaw**, *Department of Zoology, Oklahoma State University*.