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Review of *Windswept: A Passionate View of the Prairie Grasslands* Text and photographs by Wayne Lynch

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Windswept: A Passionate View of the Prairie Grasslands. Text and photographs by Wayne Lynch. Calgary, AB: Fifth House Publishers, 2004. 135 pp. Photographs, references, index. C\$29.95 paper, US\$19.95 paper.

Many people never visit the vast grasslands of the midcontinent, or they cross it with scant attention, speeding down major highways to the more stunning scenery of the Rockies or coastlines. Common perceptions focus on the seemingly boring topography (relatively flat), near-constant winds, and extreme temperatures. But Wayne Lynch's book of photographs and evocative text captures the subtle, dynamic beauty of the prairie landscape and provides fascinating details about the plants and animals that live there, making even those familiar with this landscape want to look more closely.

Windswept focuses on the northern prairies, stretching from the Dakotas and Montana into Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. A recognized wildlife and natural history photographer, Wayne Lynch has melded beautiful photographs of landscapes, plants, and animals with accessible text to give the reader a better appreciation of the ecology and features, large and small, that characterize the northern prairies. He is a self-proclaimed "critter junkie," collecting intriguing details on the life histories and behaviors of animals in their native habitats. He maintains a light tone by including moments of humor and displaying child-like enthusiasm for his subjects.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The introduction provides an overview of the major grassland types comprising the North American prairies and the life history patterns of the native animals. The second chapter, "The Land: Its Face and Temperament," presents an excellent digest of the geological and climatic forces shaping the prairies, from ancient seas and dinosaurs through the ice age to the present. Each of the next five chapters explores a landform—level plains, sandhills, coulees, sloughs, and badlands—offering descriptions of the landscape, geology, climatic forces, and interesting

ecological aspects of various plants and animals typically found there. Photographs in each chapter are not necessarily related directly to information in the text but instead represent animals, plants, or habitats associated with that landform. Figure headings add more interesting tidbits on locations and life histories. Unfortunately, there is no concluding discussion following these chapters, just an abrupt end that leaves this reader wanting some synthesis to tie the book together. A reference section provides suggestions, largely nontechnical, for further reading. The index focuses on common and scientific names of plants and animals but also includes some place names.

Overall, the text provides a good introduction to prairie ecology ranging from a landscape perspective to intriguing details (e.g., the compound eyes of bees versus dragonflies). I found the science presented to be wide-ranging, interesting, and largely accurate. The one section I found oversimplified is the author's description of wetlands ecosystems. Although he correctly points out the importance of surface runoff, for example, he fails to note the critical interconnection of many sloughs with groundwater. He also neglects the role of groundwater and soils as they affect nutrient and mineral concentrations. These oversights, however, should not diminish the reader's enjoyment and appreciation of the book's presentation of prairie ecology.

For those who have never visited the prairies, *Wind-swept* provides a strong sense of place. For those already familiar with this landscape, the book engenders a greater appreciation for its ecology and a keener eye for the small details that make it fascinating. **Jane E. Austin**, U.S. Geological Survey, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, North Dakota.