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Review of *Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas: A Field Guide* By Michael J. Haddock

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Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas: A Field Guide. By Michael J. Haddock. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. ix + 374 pp. Photographs, illustrations, finding aids, glossary, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paper.

Field guides serve multiple purposes. They are windows into the identities and attributes of a subset of biota. At their best they are also primers of patterns of biodiversity, ecological relationships, and conservation issues and serve as entry points for kindling interest in natural sciences and conservation.

This guide accomplishes some but not all of these roles. It is a robust compilation of flowering herbaceous plants from throughout Kansas, including grasses, sedges, and rushes, as well as a few showy woody species. It contains color photographs and descriptions for more than 300 species, including many of the common and conspicuous species in the state. Individual species accounts are arranged, one per page, alphabetically by family within broad color groups. Each entry includes a color photo with accompanying text.

The introduction compresses into two pages an elegant and informative microsynopsis of the Kansas landscape.

The longer section of the introduction devoted to plant morphology and terminology is jumpy and tough reading for botanical novices. It omits critical information, such as an explanation in the text or glossary to accompany the illustration of a compound leaf. This is one of the most important concepts in plant identification for amateur audiences to master, and its omission is particularly regrettable since the text descriptions frequently refer to compound leaves.

The photos are generally excellent, although most feature close-ups of flowers even when these are not particularly useful for identification. Thus, the unique appearance of *Lygodesmia juncea* is obscured, appearing to the reader as just another pink flower. A few of the photographs are poor, making one wonder why the author used his own images in these cases. For example, the photo of *Ipomoea hederacea* is not only an abysmal and unattractive image for this showy species, but further misleads by featuring prominently the leaves of a cucurbit.

Morphological descriptions accompanying the photographs comprise the majority of each text entry. These appear to be largely derived from *Flora of the Great Plains* (1986), with metric measurements converted to inches. While unfailingly accurate, these descriptions are fairly technical and perhaps beyond the easy use of the guide's intended audience. Nor are they particularly helpful in discriminating among similar taxa. A well-designed synoptic key to groups of related species is included after the main text.

Except for information about range performance, there is little about ecology, conservation issues, and field identification tips. This is especially problematic for introduced species, which are not consistently delineated as introduced (e.g., *Hypericum perforatum*, *Lactuca serriola*, *Poa pratensis*, *Sinapsis arvensis*). Some common noxious weeds, such as *Lespedeza cuneata*, that are threats to both the productivity and ecological integrity of Kansas habitats are inexplicably not included. Similarly, there is no mention of problems associated with other aggressive exotic species that are discussed, such as *Coronilla varia*.

The book's design is utilitarian but not outstanding. Text entries, including headings, are all rendered in the same font, where judicious use of bolding and font size would have facilitated navigation within an entry. When two photos are used to illustrate a second feature or a related species, the topic of the second photo is identified by an asterisk; a caption would have been more helpful. The use of author citations in headings clutters the text, rendering scientific names even more abstruse to the novice and

adding nothing useful, since the taxonomic authorities followed are cited in the introduction.

Despite these problems, this is a worthwhile book for a wide audience with interest in Kansas plants—from casual nature enthusiasts to students, land managers, and ranchers. It contains a wealth of accurate information, a plethora of high quality images, and comes at a bargain price. Although it will not be the only field guide needed to identify Kansas wildflowers (Freeman and Schofield's *Roadside Wildflowers of the Southern Great Plains* [1991] remaining the gold standard), this will be a useful tool throughout the Central Great Plains. **Douglas Ladd**, *The Nature Conservancy, St. Louis, Missouri*.