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Spring 2006

Review of *On Ancient Wings: The Sandhill Cranes of North America* By Michael Forsberg

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Hjertaas, Dale, "Review of *On Ancient Wings: The Sandhill Cranes of North America* By Michael Forsberg" (2006). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 819.
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On Ancient Wings: The Sandhill Cranes of North America. By Michael Forsberg. Lincoln, NE: Michael Forsberg Photography, 2004. 168 pp. Maps, photographs. \$45.00 cloth.

Michael Forsberg is a gifted photographer. I opened this book for a quick look, saw the first photograph, a stunning full-page photo of a dancing Sandhill crane leaping for the sky, and did not put the book down until I had looked at every one of its 154 photographs. Particularly beautiful is a two-page photograph silhouetting a dozen Sandhill cranes against a golden sky, their legs extended, preparing to land at a roost along the Platte. Through the photographs Forsberg shows us the places where cranes live and gives us a look into their lives, capturing copulation, hatching, chick rearing, feeding, and even death, from hitting a power line.

With assistance from the International Crane Foundation, Forsberg set out to photograph and document Sandhill cranes and their habitats throughout North America. The book is structured around major crane habitats: the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Upper Midwest, the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta, California's Central Valley, Bosque Del Apache and other parts of the arid Southwest, Denali National Park, and Saskatchewan. An entire chapter looks at the great spring gathering on the Platte River in Nebraska. The final section examines the threatened Florida, Cuba, and Mississippi Sandhill cranes.

Forsberg is able to share his observations and understandings of cranes and their habitats very effectively. His writing is often based on his own observations, in some cases quoting directly from his journal. He combines writing and photography to create an enjoyable and remarkably compelling account of the cranes' lives, habitats, and perils.

The chapter on the Platte is a fine example. A half-million Sandhill cranes, 80% of the world population, stop each spring along a small stretch of the Platte River. Much of the 200 miles of river formerly used by the

Sandhill cranes is no longer suitable due to development, breaking of prairies and wet meadows, and changed water flows which have allowed trees to develop on the sandbars used for roosting. So cranes crowd into about 20 large roost sites in spectacular flocks of 10,000 to 15,000 birds, increasing competition for food and risk from disease and storms. Forsberg creates an understanding of the issues but also conveys the beauty and thrill of thousands of cranes lifting from the river or returning at night and shows the cranes' daily pattern, even including wonderful photos of Sandhills bathing.

Forsberg has researched his material and worked with many crane biologists to produce an accurate portrayal. I spotted only one significant error. His statement that whooping cranes almost always abandon their second egg after the first chick hatches is false. Some parents do abandon, but many hatch both eggs. In 2004, 20 pairs were observed at Wood Buffalo National Park with two young (personal communication, Brian Johns, Environment Canada).

I found this book easy to read and enjoyable. It is not a technical study, but it left me with a better understanding of the Sandhill crane. Anyone interested in cranes and their conservation should savor *On Ancient Wings*. **Dale G. Hjertaas**, *Saskatchewan Watershed Authority*.