

Wildlife of Nebraska: A Natural History, by Paul A. Johnsgard. 2020. Bison Books, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 495 pages + xxiv. \$34.95 (paperback, eBook). ISBN: 978-1-4962-2026-4.

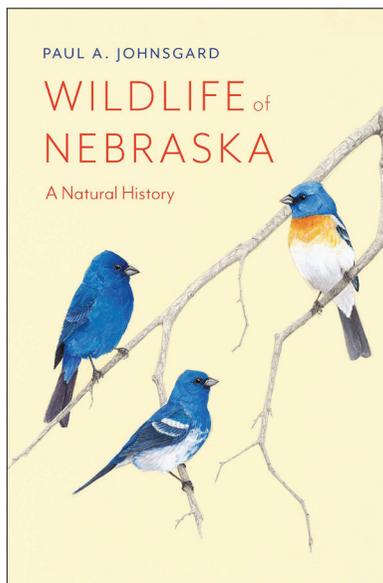
Nebraska is at the heart of the Great Plains, and the state's unique geology and geography contribute to a unique collection of modern vertebrate animals—the wildlife of Nebraska. Paul Johnsgard, Emeritus Professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, provides a survey of select wild mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians in *Wildlife of Nebraska: A Natural History*. With nary an invitation to his reader, Johnsgard plunges into this volume with a description of the foundations of the landscapes over which modern wildlife roam. In a manner similar to the force of the rivers and glaciers that he describes in the introduction, Johnsgard has shaped the understanding of natural systems of the Great Plains for several generations of readers. This most recent offering is another slice of biodiversity from the prolific master of sorting the diversity of the plains into books by place and taxonomic group.

Wildlife of Nebraska is predominately an encyclopedia-like presentation of natural history; only 48 of its 495 pages are free-flowing prose, which is found in the introductory chapter and the initial pages of three chapters that cover mammals, birds, and amphibians/reptiles. Perhaps no one is better suited for this detailed, cross-taxonomic description of wild animals than the author who has spent his career making observations on the plains. Johnsgard writes for other natural historians with technical phrases that the lay public would find hard to decipher such as this sentence from Chapter 1 (page 11): “It is convenient to use conspicuous typical plants or plant communities in judging biogeographic classifications and relatively stationary evidence of definable and climatically based geographic units.”

The book is split among sections on mammals (103 pages), birds (232 pages), reptiles/amphibians (41 pages), a species checklist (48 pages), and a unique section (16 pages) entitled “Some Natural Treasures in Nebraska.” The latter section describes more than 20 national monuments, state parks, sanctuaries, and other destinations for wildlife viewing in detail with species highlights, activities, and phone numbers for visitor centers. Readers will find nuggets of treasure in the species accounts that describe unique behaviors, interesting life history, and in some cases observations from the author that bring a personal touch to the species' entry.

The volume that is most similar among Johnsgard's collection of over 60 natural history works is *The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity* (Johnsgard 2001). While *The Nature of Nebraska* includes plants, *Wildlife of Nebraska* does not. A careful comparison of the two volumes will find some of the author's illustrations of animals, regional maps, and geological time scale from *The Nature of Nebraska* to be repeated in the current volume. As with other books by the author, the line drawings are again meticulous and appropriate, while lending creative touch that brings the species accounts to life.

The species accounts found in *Wildlife of Nebraska* are detailed. Sections in the accounts include: identification, voice, status, habitats and ecology, breeding biology, and



selected references. The author provides a section in the species accounts on hunting and populations for mammals that are hunted, although trapping of furbearer species was not discussed and hunting of gamebirds was not mentioned in the avian section. I found it interesting that avian species accounts did not share the identification and voice section found in the mammal and amphibian/reptile chapters. Compared to the open-structured paragraphs used to describe individual species (I compared *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* Linnaeus [Bald Eagle] and *Tympanuchus cupido* Linnaeus [Greater Prairie-Chicken] as examples) in *The Nature of Nebraska* (Johnsgard 2001), the species accounts in *Wildlife of Nebraska* are structured and chock-full of information. A middle school student in Nebraska who needs to flesh out a report for biology class or a 4H conservation project for a handful of wildlife species would find the life-history information provided to be a gold mine of information.

Wildlife of Nebraska makes an excellent life history addition to the bookshelf of anyone with keen interest and knowledge of wild animals of the Great Plains. The choice of “wildlife” for the title may result in some people purchasing this book to read on vacation, but I think most will find it not to be a cover-to-cover read. A reader will not find riveting stories about management, conservation, or adventures with wild animals within these pages. *Wildlife of Nebraska* is not that type of book; it is a solid, academic volume brimming with natural history. Best to keep this book on the shelf and handy should you need to know when to hang your hummingbird feeder, where to see *Cygnus buccinator* Richardson (Trumpeter Swans) during breeding season in Nebraska, what an *Sternula antillarum athalassos* Burleigh and Lowery (Interior Least Tern) nest looks like, or how exactly to describe the vocalizations of a *Bison bison* Linnaeus (American Bison) or a *Pseudacris maculata* Agassiz (Boreal Chorus Frog).

Book Reviewer: Larkin A. Powell, Professor of Conservation Biology and Animal Ecology, 419 South Hardin Hall, 3310 Holdrege Street, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, 68583-0974, USA.

Literature Cited

Johnsgard, P.A. 2001. *The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, USA.