

To Find a Pasqueflower: A Story of the Tallgrass Prairie, by Greg Hoch. 2022. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, USA. 269 pages + xiv. \$19.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-60938-825-6.

As in his 2019 *Sky Dance of the Woodcock: The Habits and Habitats of a Strange Little Bird*, Greg Hoch has created an extensive survey of knowledge about his topic, the tallgrass prairie, including descriptions by the first Europeans to behold it, an impressive number of scientific publications, and the word-art dedicated to this unique landscape. Throughout his professional life, Hoch has had the good fortune to interact with many of the shining lights of prairie management and lore, and he incorporates the wisdom from his in-the-field discussions and correspondence with them. As he writes in his quirkily titled “Disclaimer,” Hoch infused his synthesis deeply with “his love and wonder” of the prairie, and it is evident.

One could say that the tallgrass prairie is a rare historical artifact (which sadly, few have ever seen). In answer to the question “Where did it come from?,” Hoch convincingly elaborates that human activity figured mightily into the dynamics and maintenance of the tallgrass prairie in the relatively short period of the most recent decamillennium. This occurred through the agency of fires at a much greater frequency than fires would have occurred without humans’ use of this tool (thus, human artifact). Climatic conditions and presence of grazing herds figured in too, and this book does justice to all these factors of prairie creation and maintenance that prevailed until about 200 years ago, while emphasizing, I think correctly, the human-fire role more than do many older writings.

While we call the tallgrass prairie unique, Hoch notes that most flora of the tallgrass prairie is not endemic to the system, with the prairie species being found in smidges and dashes in sun-flecked plant associations of eastern temperate North America and often well beyond. It has long been so, as the prairie grew and shrank, the prairie biota was subsumed into surrounding vegetation, and the prairie very likely assimilated more species as it re-expanded. Yet, nowhere do these plants come together to form the magnificent, (once) expansive native grassland of the humid, eastern third of the North American Great Plains. Though difficult to define, and though Hoch humbly declares (p. 186) “I’m not sure what prairie is anymore,” he notes that plant ecologists and those with related interests know a prairie when they are standing in one. In the last paragraphs of this book, he urges readers to visit new prairies and revisit familiar ones to learn from and love them, and finally, “Just get out there!” I can honestly say I really felt the urge to visit a prairie after reading his book. Writing this review in the dead of winter, I plan to reread *To Find a Pasqueflower* first, then “get out there” with the first signs of spring! This book deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone fascinated by prairies.

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