

2003

Review of *The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity* Paul A. Johnsgard

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The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity. Paul A. Johnsgard. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. xxvi +402 pp. Maps, illustrations, index. \$29.95 cloth.

As a newcomer to Nebraska and someone learning the natural history of this place, I thoroughly enjoyed *The Nature of Nebraska*. More consequentially, the book will serve as a valuable resource for longtime naturalists, teachers, and others who want to learn about Nebraska's natural history.

Opening with a discussion of geology and ecology, Johnsgard offers a broad overview of Nebraska's ecological diversity, intertwining material on the natural forces that have historically dominated the Plains with a discussion of the anthropogenic forces currently altering the region's unique ecological nature. Approximately half of the book is devoted to more specific descriptions of nine ecological regions and biological communities in the state. These chapters describe highlights of the region's ecology and its biological communities, integrating information on the past physical and biological processes with human-induced changes. These highlights are followed by a series of species descriptions of the ecology of keystone and typical species as well as declining and endangered species, each focusing on biology but also incorporating interesting historical or economic facts.

The volume's remaining half is composed of three appendixes: an extensive listing of vertebrates, representative invertebrates, and common vascular plants (categorized as trees, shrubs, and woody vines, terrestrial forbs, prairie and range grasses and sedges, and shoreline and aquatic plants); a useful guide to four hundred natural areas, including state parks, federal lands, and other local areas; and a short list of selected *Nebraska State Museums* notes available from the University of Nebraska State Museum in Lincoln.

Johnsgard writes beautifully, his writing reflecting the subtlety and depth of emotions that aficionados of natural history feel as they study their environment: a delight in learning about the complexity of nature; respect and admiration for its intricacies and beauty; indignation and frustration with our negative impacts; support for those who work to preserve and restore what we cherish; and hope in nature's resiliency.

In recognition of its excellence, the Nebraska Center for the Book chose *The Nature of Nebraska* as its 2002 Non-Fiction Honor Book (one of two awards in non-fiction). **L. LaReesa Wolfenbarger**, *Department of Biology, University of Nebraska at Omaha*.