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Prairie Birds: Fragile Splendor in the Great Plains.—Paul A. Johnsgard. 2001. University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, Kansas. xvii + 331 pp., 14 maps, 47 drawings, 12 tables, 3 appendices, glossary, references. ISBN 0-7006-1067-7 $29.95 (cloth).

Paul Johnsgard loves the prairies, and his account of grasslands and birds of the Great Plains reflects his passion for both. This book is a fascinating mixture of science, history, personal observation, opinion, and natural history accounts of prairie birds. Of the book's two parts, Part 1 is the more science-based and begins with chapters describing the evolution of grasslands in North America. Part 2 includes accounts of 32 grassland bird species and ends with a chapter on conservation. Three appendices include a list of major grassland preserves by state or province; a table of the status of endemic grassland birds during summer at 37 national wildlife refuges, national parks, and national grasslands; and a list of bird and plant species mentioned in the book. A glossary and an extensive list of references round out the back matter. Interspersed throughout the text are quotes from the likes of Charles Darwin, William Least Heat-Moon, and Wallace Stegner.

The first chapter reviews the development of Great Plains grasslands through time, beginning at the termination of the Mesozoic era. The second chapter expands to the evolution of the biotic communities of the Great Plains and ends with specific descriptions of grassland bird communities. The third chapter reviews threats to prairie birds including fire, grazing, conversion to crops, and cowbird parasitism. All of these chapters include numerous maps, which I found cumbersome and cluttered with unnecessary lines such as county boundaries. Several maps are dedicated to similar themes; as a result, they overlap in subject matter and become confusing. For example, three maps show presettlement grassland types of North America, but no single map shows all grassland types. I was left with the sense that the material could have been condensed into fewer, more comprehensive maps.

The tables within the third chapter pertain to cowbird parasitism and serve as an excellent literature review on the subject. Any student or researcher working on cowbird parasitism or productivity of grassland birds can glean a wealth of background information from Tables 4–6. I was disappointed, however, by the lack of coverage of nest predation. Likewise, entire books could be written about the effects of grazing, fire, and croplands on grassland birds, and the coverage in this book seemed insufficient. However, Johnsgard does state in the preface that he chose to take a less comprehensive approach to writing this book in order to focus on selected species' ecology and behavior.

Part 2 contains accounts of 32 grassland bird species, each chapter interweaving the natural history of 2–4 species: ''High drama on the High Plains'' includes Prairie Falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) and Mountain Plovers (*Charadrius montanus*), while ''Furtive sparrows in the grass'' includes Clay-colored (*Spizella pallida*), Grasshopper (*Ammodramus savannarum*), and Vesper Sparrows (*Pooecetes gramineus*). Each of these chapters begins with either an essay relating the author's personal experiences or an overview of the group of birds in general. I particularly enjoyed reading Johnsgard's descriptions of specific places because he really captures the magic of the prairie in these essays. The species accounts each cover winter and summer habits (range, habitats, and foods), migration, territoriality, nesting behavior, and nest success or survival of young. Accounts of species named after people (e.g., Baird's Sparrow [*A. bairdii*]) or places in-

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clude a brief history of how each was named. Each chapter is followed by a list of suggested readings organized by species. Within the accounts Johnsgard interjects his own observations and allows the reader insights to favorite species or intriguing details. My favorites are his descriptions of Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), ''Like Cyrano's nose, its bill is so long that, instead of being a visual liability, it adds grandeur and a degree of distinction to the bird's appearance,'' and Prairie Falcon, ''simply a Peregrine cloaked in grassland camouflage.'' Johnsgard's illustrations (line drawings) of the birds often include sonograms of their primary songs or diagrams of their courtship displays. Several illustrations compare the heads and feet of similar species.

The concluding chapter, ''The disappearing prairie and its declining avifauna,'' goes through a time-travel scenario using a 575-mile trip through the Great Plains as an analogy to traveling through 575 million years of earth's history. This chapter continues with various analyses of Breeding Bird Survey data (the most recent data used are from 1996) showing the distribution, abundance, and declines of the grassland bird guild. In addition to presenting somewhat outdated data, the author mentions the National Biological Service in this chapter and throughout the text, although this agency has not existed since 1995. I think this chapter would have been better placed as the last chapter in Part 1, where it would fit in with the historical account of Great Plains prairies as well as provide a good prelude to the species accounts.

The list of grassland preserves in Appendix A is extensive and includes not only federal lands, but also state-managed grasslands and Nature Conservancy preserves. It presents a brief description, acreage, and contact information for each site. This is one of the most exhaustive lists of its kind and is useful to anyone interested in prairies, whether casual traveler or researcher. Finally, the list of references is an excellent resource for anyone interested in grassland birds. There are over 600 citations published up to the year 2000, including online resources such as the series on the effects of management practices on grassland birds published by the U.S. Geological Survey Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. I wish the author had included affiliations of the numerous people he mentions by name throughout the text, because many nonscientists and beginning graduate students are not likely to be familiar with these people.

I enjoyed this book because I, like the author, have a special fondness for the prairie and its birds. The author injects humor (a story about being caught by a university administrator at Scotts Bluff National Monument while lying on his back watching Ferruginous Hawks [*Buteo regalis*]), pathos (a social commentary about the Pine Ridge/Black Hill country), and his incredible wealth of knowledge into his writing. The species accounts will appeal to birders because they provide summaries of each species' natural history, particularly during the breeding season. In addition, these accounts include wonderful insights and observations from a person raised and living in the heart of the prairie. Scientists will appreciate the reviews of literature presented in numerous tables and the comprehensive list of references. The sections on the development of prairie ecosystems provide a great review for students. I recommend this book to anyone interested in grassland birds as both a useful resource and an enjoyable read.—ABBY N. POWELL, Alaska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99775-7020, E-mail: ffanp@uaf.edu

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