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Review of *The Platte: Channels in Time* By Paul A. Johnsgard

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The Platte: Channels in Time. By Paul A. Johnsgard. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Photographs, maps, appendix, bibliographical notes, index. xiii + 154 pp. \$13.95.

This little book about Nebraska's Platte River is an inch wide and a mile deep.

In both form and content, the book is an argument for the life of the Platte River Valley. The prose text is less than a hundred pages; weaving in and around it are verses from Pawnee songs; maps and aerial photos; photos of animals, birds, and plants. Appendices identify the many different species of life that flourish in the valley, their locales and seasons.

The text takes us from before time until our own time, then confronts us with tomor-

row. The author associates the Platte with the spirit of the bison and the Pawnee, then shows us the life of the river: we see the cranes on the sandbars; the wood ducks nesting in the shoreline forest; and many other birds, animals, and grasses beautifully described in their natural habitat. This is natural history at its best. The detail recreates the ecology of the valley like a four-dimensional spider web.

Suddenly we meet the brief facts of Nebraska's exploitive water policies, and the briefer outlook for the river. The author is not sanguine. Indeed the book begins with an apology to the twenty-first century for our "having allowed the river to be destroyed."

This book appeals to all who have wandered creekbeds with grass in their teeth; it is learned, but the learning is worn lightly and with grace. It has special relevance, of course, for Nebraska and is a must for anyone who wishes to understand life there; but *The Platte* transcends that topical relevance in its style, and in its logic it applies wherever the press of population and economic exploitation destroy our rivers and valleys.

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