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Book Review - The Guide to Iowa's State Preserves

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"Short-term Survival Lessons: Corn, Cows, and Cowbirds." In this latter section, Johnsguard discusses impacts of fragmentation, agriculture, and brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds, which he discusses as not being independent of each other. None of this information is new, but it might serve as an introduction to the novice. While I did not check the references extensively for accuracy, I did notice that Johnsguard incorrectly cites his own work on cowbirds (*The Avian Brood Parasites: Deception at the Nest*, 1997) as being published in 1998 on page 57.

The remainder of the book is mainly devoted to species accounts subdivided into "ecological" units. Two examples are "Dawn Dances on the Prairie" about prairie chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse and "Shorebird Sagas" about Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, and Upland Sandpipers. While I enjoyed the personal anecdotes that precede the species accounts, much of this information is also not new. I found the species accounts and behavioral descriptions to be fairly dry reading, but they would serve as a good field guide to someone interested in observing the birds on their own.

The final chapter, "The Disappearing Prairie and Its Declining Avifauna," is a look to the future that points to trends in populations of grassland birds. Johnsguard provides background into the history of the demise of the North American grasslands along with compilations of data, however, there is not much more to this chapter.

What conclusions can be made about this book? There is clearly a need for synthesis works, and Johnsguard has produced many. However, at what point are the syntheses synthesizing each other? For an ornithologist specializing in grassland birds, there is little new that the book offers. For other scientists with an interest in grassland birds, this book is a convenient reference with its updated literature list and summary tables, however, most informed people would also find nothing new or earth shattering. However, in fairness, Johnsguard did not intend the book to be a definitive scientific treatise. For the interested layperson or the beginning student, the book will provide a good introduction to some of the more interesting prairie birds and their behaviors in a readable format at an attractive price, and we all can enjoy Johnsguard's pen and ink illustrations of birds in their habitats.—NEIL P. BERNSTEIN, *Department of Biology, Mount Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402*.

The Guide to Iowa's State Preserves. Ruth Herzberg and John Pearson. 2001. The University of Iowa Press. Iowa City, Iowa. 196 pages. ISBN 0-87745-774-3. \$14.95, paper.

The Iowa State Preserves System gives the highest protection afforded by law to sites "dedicated for maintenance as nearly as possible in [their] natural condition." To date, ninety sites have been dedicated as biological, geological, archaeological, scenic, or historic pre-

serves, declaring that such use is the site's "highest, best, and most important use for the public benefit" (State Preserves Act of 1965). In a state as dramatically altered as Iowa, such remnants are of intense interest to professional and amateur naturalists of all inclinations, as well as to anyone who appreciates nature. Yet understanding the basic qualities of these preserve sites is not always easy. Even finding them has sometimes been difficult—at least it was until publication of *The Guide to Iowa's State Preserves*, released late in 2001 by the University of Iowa Press.

Now, for the first time, a guide to our preserves is commercially available and widely accessible. This 196-page guide includes detailed, clearly written, one-page descriptions of each preserve, based on thorough searches of published and unpublished studies of specific areas. Included are significant assets of the preserve—such as historic facts, noteworthy plants, and geological features. The book's authorship by Ruth Herzberg, an experienced naturalist, and Dr. John Pearson, an ecologist charged with carrying out the Preserves Board's mandates, ensures the book's accuracy.

Descriptions this comprehensive were not available in the preceding booklet on the preserve system, which was distributed on a more limited basis (upon request, by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources). Also new in this guide are full-page, GIS-based nested maps, showing each site's location in the state and in the county, and then detailing specific access routes and topographical features for each site. (Detailed written directions are also given.) E-mail addresses and web sites, as well as conventional addresses, are included for persons seeking more information.

In publishing a guidebook, one always runs the risk of stimulating visitation to the point of damaging a site's special features. However a broad base of public support is needed if natural areas are to be preserved and maintained—and this means encouraging visitation and sharing factual information about a site. This guidebook attempts to strike a balance between these conflicting needs by omitting maps of areas that should not be visited by the general public, either because of their fragility or because they are on private lands. Species that are endangered, commercially valuable, or highly sought by collectors have also been excluded from the plant lists in the descriptions.

The guide is sure to be well accepted by a broad range of readers. (All copies of the last preserves booklet, published in 1992, were snatched up in two years and have been unavailable ever since.) This book also is significant as a meaningful addition to Iowa's natural history literature—a growing body of easily accessible books that bring our state's natural history into the realm of common understanding. Hopefully the book will lead many to cherish our preserves, as well as natural features more generally, and thus to advocate for the natural snippets of our past that still remain.—CORNELIA F. MUTEL, *IHR—Hydrosciences & Engineering, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242*.