

BOOK REVIEWS

Booming from the Mists of Nowhere: The Story of the Greater Prairie-Chicken. Greg Hoch. 2015. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, USA. 125 pages. \$19.95 (paper and eBook). ISBN: 978-1-60938-387-9 and 978-1-60938-388-6.

The Greater Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido pin-natus*) is an iconic species inhabiting one of the most iconic and rarest habitats in the world—the tallgrass prairies of central North America. To tell the story of the Greater Prairie-Chicken is a monumental task. Its history is intricately woven into pre- and post-European settlement of the North American prairies in such a way that knowledge of the species is spread over several centuries. Thus, researching the “old and the new” regarding the Greater Prairie-Chicken requires a substantial literature review, much of which occurs in publications from the 1800s. Hoch has done a very good job researching this history.

On the cover of *Booming from the Mists of Nowhere*, readers are immediately given notice of the author’s approach to scripting this book. The book title encompasses a lovely snippet from the following paragraph in Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*:

“There is a peculiar virtue in the music of elusive birds. Songsters that sing from the top-most boughs are easily seen and as easily forgotten; they have the mediocrity of the obvious. What one remembers is the invisible Hermit Thrush pouring silver chords from impenetrable shadows; the soaring crane trumpeting from behind a cloud; the prairie chicken booming from the mists of nowhere; the quail’s Ave Maria in the hush of dawn.” (Leopold 1949)

The reader will find the book is filled with other lovely quotes from a myriad of authors covering an extremely extended timeline. One of the many benefits of this book is the reminder to the reader of the rich literature that can be sought and savored upon completion of Hoch’s efforts. The

descriptive details and observations of earlier writers will astonish readers. These include historical observations by Willa Cather, Wallace Grange, Hazel Grange, Frederick and Fran Hamerstrom, William Alfred Quayle, J. Herbert Quick, and William Least Heat-Moon. Some are biologists and others are not; that is the beauty of the literature that describes this species’ history. The continental population of this species reached its zenith at a time when Americans and Canadians spent most of the daylight hours working on the land—working and observing.

In this book, the author covers the biology of the species; its habitats, populations, and harvest; its relationship with humans as it pertains to prairie landscapes; modern threats to prairie-chicken populations; and past and current management. Hoch provides understandable graphs and maps when describing the population changes in various parts of the species’ range, much of it related to the prairie-chicken’s relationship with agriculture over the past 200+ years.

Readers will enjoy this easy-to-read book. Each chapter presents a learning experience and fine bits of writing from the distant past. One does not need to be a biologist to enjoy *Booming from the Mists of Nowhere*, and all readers will learn something from reading it. Those with a passion for history can let their minds wander and think about all the tumultuous events that occurred in the country when Greater Prairie-Chickens populations were at their peak (e.g., wars between European settlers and Indian Nations, homesteading, the Civil War, railroad expansion, market hunting). The author’s passion for native prairie and the Greater Prairie-Chicken is evident throughout the book. It is gratifying that Hoch has written such a complete *story* of this native, iconic prairie grouse.—Ross H. Hier, *Area Wildlife Supervisor, Section of Wildlife, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Crookston, Minnesota 56716, USA.*

LITERATURE CITED

Leopold, A. 1949. *A Sand County almanac and sketches from here and there*. Oxford University Press, New York, New York, USA.