

Book Review



“Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains, Second Edition”
Author: Jon Farrar
Publisher: University of Iowa Press

By **CHRIS HELZER**

If you happen to own a copy of Jon Farrar’s “Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains” from 20 years ago, you’re a lucky person. Only 10,000 copies were printed, and all were sold within about a year and a half of publication. Since that time, anyone not fortunate enough to get in on the original windfall has had to beg, borrow or steal copies from others. This forced those of us who actually owned the book to be constantly vigilant lest a “friend” walk off with what had quickly become not only a valuable field guide but also a collector’s item. Fortunately, through what I’m sure was clever foresight by the original publisher, the books were designed with a cover that fell off after only a month or two of use. I’m pretty sure the main reason I still own my copy is that no one searching my bookshelf or field pack would have recognized the coverless, dog-eared and taped-together remains of the field guide as something worth “borrowing.” Boy, were they wrong.

Fortunately, after 20 years, I can finally let my guard down because a second edition has come out, and it’s even better than the first—and that’s saying a lot. I sure hope they printed a lot more

of them this time because the cover seems very firmly affixed...

The second edition is a beautiful book, published this time by the University of Iowa Press. It still features Farrar’s excellent photographs, but the sharp and saturated reproduction of those images make them nearly jump off the page. The new edition is about 50 pages longer than the first. While that additional length accommodates the addition of a few new wildflower species, it also allows the original photos and text more room to breathe, making the book both more attractive and easier to read. Farrar also updated his essay on wildflower conservation and included an updated map and descriptions of Nebraska’s wildflower regions and the plant communities found there.

As in the original version, the new guide has the wildflowers organized by flower color, and the species within each color class arranged by flowering date. In other words, if you find a yellow flower blooming in May, you can pick



Purple poppy mallow. (Jon Farrar)

the plant they’re identifying really matches the one on the page. When a plant is similar in appearance to another, the portions of the description that are most useful in distinguishing one from another are emphasized by italics. In many cases, the text also includes other interesting trivia about the plant itself. For example, I now know that common mullein (a tall plant with yel-

low flowers) is native to Europe, where Romans dipped the dried flower spikes in tallow and burned them as torches. In addition, if I want to recapture the blond hair of my early youth, I could boil the flowers in lye to make yellow hair dye!

While the field guide is written in clear and concise language, it necessarily includes some terminology that might not be familiar to some readers. Fortunately, there is an illustrated glossary at the back of the book that includes line drawings of plant parts, along with the names used to describe them. While the glossary is very useful, the short length of that section is testament to how well Farrar describes the plants in ways that don’t often require a visit to the back of the book.

The “Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains” is a book that anyone with even a passing interest in the outdoors of Nebraska should own. Whether you’re a biologist, nature enthusiast, hunter, fisherman or landowner, it’s a resource you will find yourself using again and again. You can buy the book through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or from just about any bookseller. It might be a good idea to buy a few extras, just in case you have “friends” like mine who like to borrow things now and then.



Plains coreopsis. (Jon Farrar)

up the book, flip to the yellow flower section and find that the flower within its pages, along with the other spring-blooming plants. The new edition even added some color tabs to make it that much easier to find the right section of the book quickly.

Farrar’s descriptions of each flower include common and Latin names, blooming season, the habitats and regions of the state it’s likely to be found and a long, detailed description of the plant to help the reader be sure

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FILM SCREENING & PANEL DISCUSSION:
“When We Stop Counting”:
Education, Poverty, and Culture.
First Plymouth Congregational Church;
2000 D Street, Mayflower Hall

APR 17, 7-9 PM

Panelists: **Dr. Steve Joel**, Superintendent of Schools, Lincoln, NE; **Elisabeth Reinkordt**, filmmaker, Nebraska Department of Education; **Karen Buchfinck**, counselor, Crete, NE, schools; **Paul A. Olson**, UNL Education and English, former USOE Study Commission.

The documentary, “When We Stop Counting,” follows six Hispanic high school students in Crete, NE, through their personal struggles and triumphs while bearing the pressure of their parents’ back-breaking sacrifice in hopes of achieving the American Dream.

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