

## BOOK REVIEW

**Those of the Gray Wind: The Sandhill Crane**, new edition with a new preface and afterword, by Paul A. Johnsgard. 2017. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. xii + 157 pp., 6 black and white photos, numerous sketches. Paperback, \$14.95. ISBN 978-1-4962-0157-7.

Within the past two decades, the discipline of wildlife conservation has seen a surge in ecological-modeling approaches that has profoundly affected the way we perceive animals and ecological processes. One negative outcome of our own technological advances has been the shift in focus from observations of animals in the field to collecting data to fit ecological models. Although modeling does have its place in biology, animal behavior is a thing of inexplicable beauty and timelessness, and has intrinsic value well beyond our own interest as conservationists. In *Those of the Gray Wind: The Sandhill Crane*, Paul A. Johnsgard successfully describes the chronology of migration and other behaviors of the Sandhill Crane by creating a sense of wonder for the species via the sights and sounds witnessed by fictional human characters. The book is an excellent summary of the folklore of the Sandhill Crane, how its unique behaviors fascinate humanity, and the ecology of the species throughout its life cycle. *Those of the Gray Wind* was originally published in 1981 (St. Martin's Press), and this new edition includes a new preface and afterword by the author. The preface is an excellent start because it highlights the author's motivation behind the book, which is another story about one man's fascination with cranes (consider it the book's final, contemporary chapter). The afterword includes scientific data about crane populations in North America, including population trends, conservation needs, and long-term concerns, and emphasizes the author's expertise on the species.

This book is successful for three reasons. First is the incorporation of multiple North American cultures (German settlers, Inuit, North Dakotans, Pueblo) and how each culture has perceived the Sandhill Crane over 120 years, 1860–1980. The combination of time and culture make the book more robust and keep it interesting. Second, the book includes numerous, subtle descriptions of the crane's behavior, such as body painting, courtship dance, and reproductive ecology without using biological jargon or quantitative metrics. For the visual learner, the book also includes several original sketches and figures. Last, Johnsgard makes his points concisely. My first reading took one hour while I was sitting in a blind waiting to capture axis deer. I had enough time to go back and reread my favorite chapters and fact-check the afterword before we gave up our unsuccessful attempt with the deer.

Johnsgard's approach is to describe the Sandhill Crane's annual life cycle through human eyes—and, in some instances, from the birds' point of view. The focus is primarily on human children and their interactions with Sandhill Cranes; adults are secondary characters. The book is most successful when the adults highlight the mistakes of the past. For example, "The old man listened patiently and smiled. Yes, my son, those are the crane people, who once lived here in great numbers, with the Rio Grande ran full. Their numbers were as many as the sagebrush ... but in my lifetime... they [the cranes] no longer come to our valley." These sections inspire curiosity on the crane's historical ecology and how past mistakes can be remedied to improve its outlook. Much like Aldo Leopold's tree in *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford University Press, 1949), adult cranes have a story. Johnsgard, however, stresses that, unlike the tree, we don't need to harvest cranes to know their history. The book convincingly argues through time that all we need to do is sit, watch, and listen to be fascinated.

*Those of the Gray Wind* is appropriate for all ages and reading skills, and a must-read for children or teenagers who are interested in nature or birds. The most astute and advanced readers will enjoy trying to pronounce the Inuit names of common waterfowl, waterbirds, and cranes, whereas novices will find the book easy and

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enjoyable to read, with both memorable characters and scientific facts. Adults will especially appreciate the subtle message that wisdom and respect for all forms of life comes with age, as well as the interactions between the adults and children. I recommend above all the chapters “Dance of the Inuit” and “Crane People of the Sky” by the Pueblo, though the entirety of the book is thoroughly enjoyable and poetic.

The book’s biggest drawback is the assumption that consumptive users are ignorant of and not fascinated by cranes. The book is strongly against consumptive use, and includes numerous unsourced statements that crane harvest is unethical, barbaric, and even detrimental to crane populations in North America. The book fails to see the irony that since the 1950s, when Sandhill Crane harvest was authorized and regulated in the United States, the species has increased five-fold, according to 2017 population surveys on the Platte River by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Moreover, the new afterword includes numerous statements (all factual) that cranes stage, winter, or breed on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuges or state wildlife-management areas, all of which are supported via consumptive activities through the Pitman–Roberson Act and the Waterfowl Stamp Act, among others. If you enjoy hunting in any capacity, to find balance between consumptive and nonconsumptive use, I recommend *Conservation and the American Sportsman* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1986) by John F. Reiger as a follow up to *Those of the Gray Wind*. In its new afterword, *Those of the Gray Wind* misses an excellent opportunity to promote unity between consumptive and nonconsumptive users, unity needed especially in a time when our differences so often separate us instead of common interest in the things we love binding us together.

Despite this flaw, *Those of the Gray Wind* is a must-own for the most intense crane-chasers, children interested in natural history, and adults interested in the humanities and culture. Johnsgard emphasizes our fascination with the Sandhill Crane through time, and successfully develops a sense of community for many of us who have taken time to appreciate the beauty and timelessness of this magnificent bird.

*Blake A. Grisham*