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“Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang”: Bird Extinctions Around the World Since 1600

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“Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang”:
Bird Extinctions Around the World
Since 1600

An Exhibition

February 8-June 9, 2008



DODO

Planned and Described by Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz
Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut

INTRODUCTION

There is something about the finality of extinction that brings one up short.

Never again is hard to accept—but it happens. Lives are lost and species are lost. It is sobering and worthy of contemplation—no living thing is immune, not even human beings.

Nonetheless, creatures have been going extinct since the beginning of life on earth. Extinction is a natural phenomenon. However, what is not particularly natural or particularly healthy is for living things, both animal and vegetable, to go extinct precipitously because of human rapacity or thoughtlessness. Such behavior does not bode well for any creatures, including ourselves, except perhaps for certain insects like the cockroach. Thus we should be disturbed by the loss of all biodiversity. ‘The web of life,’ ‘the balance of nature,’ are not just phrases, but intricate realities, and the continued loss of biodiversity ultimately threatens life on earth as we know it.

Why do birds go extinct? There are a number of reasons, some of them completely natural, for example, a small, specialized population of birds lost to a natural catastrophe like a volcanic eruption. Most often since 1600, however, the human factor in whole or in part has been a driving factor. Hunting, the introduction of predators and new diseases, the introduction of hardier competing species, and the destruction of habitat have all played a part. Bird populations endemic to islands have been particularly vulnerable, because, having been long isolated in a safe environment, many species have lost defense mechanisms and adaptability, including the ability to fly. They are literally “sitting ducks.” Specialized continental species inhabiting the tropics ultimately face similar risks, as large areas of rainforests are fragmented and lost to development. Climate change may also begin to pose a threat.

This exhibition only represents a quick survey of a big subject. Unfortunately, there are just too many extinct birds to aim at comprehensive coverage, except for the North American continent. Furthermore, the show focuses on bird extinctions from ca. 1600, when birds began to be recorded systematically. The exhibition is arranged geographically, beginning in Madagascar and moving east through the Indian Ocean by way of the Mascarene Islands of Mauritius, Réunion, and Rodrigues, then on to New Zealand, and from there north to the Solomon Islands and into the Western Pacific to the Japanese Bonin Islands. From the Bonins, the next stop is the very much ravaged bird fauna of Hawaii, and finally to North America beginning in Mexico, moving on to the United States, and ending in the North Atlantic. If one wonders why mainland Eurasia is not included, a likely answer is that extinctions brought about by human interactions with birds occurred there millennia ago and were not recorded.

In the preparation of this exhibition, a great debt is owed to Errol Fuller’s **Extinct Birds**, an engrossing and painful account of the species we now know are extinct. It is an excellent place to begin further exploration of this topic.



GREATER BROAD-BILLED MOA

CASE I: INDIAN OCEAN

1. EGG OF AN AEPYORNIS SHOWN ACTUAL SIZE.

Fuller, Errol. **Extinct birds.** Rev. ed. Ithaca, N.Y.: Comstock Pub., c2001.

2. DODO

Owen, Richard. **Memoir of the dodo (*Didus ineptus*, Linn.) ... with an historical introduction by the late William John Broderip.**

London: Taylor ad Francis, 1866.

3. MASCARENE PARROT

Hahn, Carl Wilhelm. **Ornithologischer Atlas, oder naturgetreue Abbildung und Beschreibung der aussereuropäischen Vögel.**

Pts. 1-17. Nürnberg, 1834-41.

4. RODRIGUES SOLITARY

Le Guat, François. **Voyage et aventures de François Leguat, & de ses compagnons en deux îles desertes des Indes Orientales...**

Londres: D. Mortier, 1720. 2 vols. in 1.

CASE II: NEW ZEALAND

5. SKELETON OF A GREATER BROAD-BILLED MOA

Owen, Richard. **Memoirs on the extinct wingless birds of New Zealand: with an appendix on those of England, Australia, Newfoundland, Mauritius, and Rodriguez.** London: J. Van Voorst, 1879. 2 vols. in 1.

6. LESSER MEGALAPTERYX

Rothschild, Lionel Walter Rothschild, Baron. **Extinct birds. An attempt to unite in one volume a short account of those birds which have become extinct in historical times--that is, within the last six or seven hundred years. To which are added a few which still exist, but are on the verge of extinction.** London: Hutchinson & Co., 1907.



HUIA

7. PIPIO

Buller, Walter Lawry. **A history of the birds of New Zealand ...**
2d ed. ... London: The Author, 1888. 2 vols. On display: vol. 1.

8. NEW ZEALAND QUAIL

The zoology of the voyage of the H. M. S. Erebus & Terror: under the command of Captain Sir James Clark Ross, during the years 1839 to 1843 ... Edited by John Richardson and John Edward Gray.

London: E. W. Janson, 1844-1875. 2 vols. in 4. On display: vol. 1, which includes "Birds of New Zealand" by G.R. Gray.

CASE III: NEW ZEALAND

9. AUCKLAND ISLANDS MERGANSER

Buller, Walter Lawry, Sir. **Supplement to the 'Birds of New Zealand.'**
London: The author, 1905. 2 vols. On display: vol. 2.

10. LAUGHING OWL

Tennyson, Alan, & Paul Martinson. **Extinct birds of New Zealand.**
Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2006.

11. HUIA

Phillipps, W. J. (William John). **The book of the huia. With a foreword by R. A. Falla.** [Christchurch, N.Z.]: Whitcombe and Tombs [1963].

CASE IV: WESTERN PACIFIC ISLANDS

12. ROBUST WHITE-EYE

Mathews, Gregory M. **The birds of Norfolk & Lord Howe islands and the Australasian south polar quadrant, with additions to "The birds of Australia" ... with hand-coloured and monochrome plates.**

London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1928.

13. CHOISEUL CRESTED PIGEON

Novitates zoologicae: a journal of zoology in connection with the Tring Museum. Vol. 11 (1904).



MAMO

14. KITTLITZ'S THRUSH

Kittlitz, F. H. von (Friedrich Heinrich von), Baron. **Über einige noch unbeschriebene Vögel von der Insel Luzon, den Carolinen und den Marianen ... gelesen am 23. November 1831.**

[St. Petersburg : Academie Imperiale des Sciences, 1831].

15. BONIN ISLAND GROSBEAK

Bonaparte, Charles Lucian, and H. Schlegel. **Monographie des loxiens. Ouvrage accompagné de 54 planches coloriées lithographiées d'après les dessins de M. Bâdeker et autres naturalistes.**

Leiden et Düsseldorf: Arnz & comp., 1850.

CASE V: HAWAII

16. LAYSAN RAIL

Bailey, Alfred M. (Alfred Marshall). **Birds of Midway and Laysan Islands.**

Denver: Denver Museum of Natural History, 1956.

17-18. AKIALOA AND NUKUPUU (& GREATER AMAKIHI)

Lichtenstein, Heinrich. **Beitrag zur ornithologischen Fauna von Californien nebst Bemerkungen über die Artkennzeichen der Pelicane und über einige Vögel von den Sandwich-Inseln.**

[Berlin: K. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1838].

Hawaii Audubon Society. **Hawaii's birds.** Honolulu, Hawaii: Hawaii Audubon Society, 1975.

19. MAMO (& BLACK MAMO)

Wilson, Scott B. **The birds of the Hawaiian Islands.** London: R. H. Porter, 1899. 64 hand colored plates drawn and lithographed by F.W. Frohawk.

CASE VI: HAWAII

20. ULA-AI-HAWANE

Wilson, Scott B. **The birds of the Hawaiian Islands.** London: R. H. Porter, 1899. 64 hand colored plates drawn and lithographed by F.W. Frohawk.



ULA-AI-HAWANE

21. HAWAII O'O

Rothschild, Lionel Walter Rothschild, Baron. **The avifauna of Laysan and the neighbouring islands: with a complete history to date of the birds of the Hawaiian possessions ... illustrated with coloured and black plates by Messrs. Keulemans and Frohawk; and plates from photographs showing bird-life and scenery.**

London: R.H. Porter, 1893-1900.

CASE VII: NORTH AMERICA

22. GUADALUPE CARACARA

Flannery, Tim F., & Peter Schouten. **A gap in nature: discovering the world's extinct animals.** Melbourne: Text Pub., c2001.

23. IMPERIAL WOODPECKER

Skutch, Alexander Frank. **Life of the woodpecker.** Illustrated by Dana Gardner. Santa Monica, Calif.: Ibis Publishing Co., c1985.



PASSENGER PIGEON

24. PASSENGER PIGEON

Wilson, Alexander. **American ornithology; or, the natural history of the birds of the United States ...; with a continuation by Charles Lucian Bonaparte, prince of Musignano. The illustrative notes, and life of Wilson, by Sir William Jardine, Bart. F.R.S.E. F.L.S. ...**

London: Whittaker, Treacher & Arnot; Edinburgh, Stirling & Kenney, 1832. 3 vols.

On display: vol. 2.

25. PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

Bent, Arthur Cleveland. **Life histories of North American woodpeckers, order Piciformes.** Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939.



CAROLINA PARAKEET

26. BACHMAN'S WARBLER

Audubon, John James. **The birds of America, from drawings made in the United States and their territories.**

New York: George R. Lockwood [c1839]. 8 vols. On display: vol. 2.

CASE VIII: NORTH AMERICA AND THE NORTH ATLANTIC

27. CAROLINA PARAKEET

Wilson, Alexander. **American ornithology, or, The natural history of the birds of the United States, illustrated with plates, engraved and coloured from original drawings taken from nature by Alexander Wilson; with a sketch of the author's life by George Ord.** New York: Collins; Philadelphia:

Harrison Hall, 1828-1829. 3 vols. + atlas

On display: atlas.

28. LABRADOR DUCK

Phillips, John C. (John Charles). **A natural history of the ducks ... with plates in color and in black and white from drawings by Frank W. Benson, Allan Brooks and Louis Agassiz Fuertes.** Boston, New York:

Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922-26. 4 vols. On display: vol. 4.

29. GREAT AUK

Dresser, H. E. (Henry Eeles). **A history of the birds of Europe: including all the species inhabiting the western palaeartic region.**

London: Published by the author, 1871-1881. 8 vols. On display: vol. 8.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GREAT AUK



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