

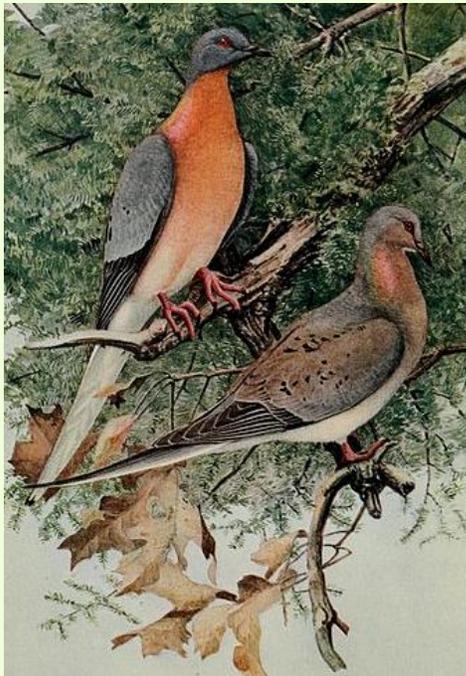


GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing 31 August 2014

Kudos for Martha *Three cheers for the ongoing efforts*



Passenger Pigeon by Louis A. Fuertes
(1907)

Passenger Pigeons were so numerous at one time that their enormous flocks were said to cover the sky, and they might block out the sun as they flew overhead. With a population in North America of between three and five billion, this species was the most abundant bird in North America and possibly the world.

Still, the outpouring of interest during the centenary marking the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon has been heartening. With Martha, the very last of her species, gone 100 years ago this week, we continue to have the opportunity to reflect on the enormity of the extinction and the meaning of it all. It serves as a meaningful cautionary tale.

Joel Greenberg's book released earlier this year, [A Feathered River Across the Sky](#) (Bloomsbury) has provided one major touchstone for the discussion. Greenberg chronicles the story in which in four decades (c.1860-1900) the species shrunk from "bewilderingly vast... to virtually gone." Of course, the slaughter of epic proportions might simply be

depressing without some of the lessons that Greenberg cites.

Another book, [The Passenger Pigeon](#) (Princeton University Press), released this week and written by extinction scholar, Errol Fuller, should provide additional acknowledgment of Martha's legacy. Drawing on illustrations, photographs, poems, journal articles, and historical accounts, the book presents a comprehensive natural history of the species.

A series of other activities has also become central to this teachable moment, especially in the last few weeks. Many of these activities are worthy of mention:

- Joel Greenberg just wrote a thoughtful essay for [Yale Environment 360](#).
- On 29 August, WBEZ (Chicago) [broadcast a story](#) that ran over seven-minutes on the Passenger Pigeon featuring interviews with Greenberg and Steve Sullivan.

- *BirdNote*, the creative two-minute radio show that reaches over 170 public radio stations across the country has new [broadcast](#) on the Passenger Pigeon.
- The American Bird Conservancy declared the Passenger pigeon its "[bird of the week.](#)"
- This weekend's *New York Times Sunday Review* has an excellent op-ed, "[Saving Our Birds.](#)" by Cornell Lab of Ornithology director John W. Fitzpatrick imagining Martha asking, "Have you learned anything from my passing?"

Amazingly, a multidisciplinary spread of events has been occurring across the country, including articles, editorials, lectures, poetry, music, theater, new research, and exhibits. Many are found under [Project Passenger Pigeon](#).

And, finally, in the coming weeks, the documentary film, *From Billions to None*, by a team led by David Mrazek, will appear on public television. You can check the list of [broadcast dates and stations](#).

The story of Martha is a painful one, loaded with near-biblical images of avarice, unbridled slaughter, and a lack of foresight. If dealt with properly, however, it can also be a story from which we can learn, plan, and address with a new and creative resolve for conservation actions. Hopefully, that work will take place throughout the rest of 2014 and beyond.

The Green Ceiling

Diversity in Environmental Organizations

Last month, Green 2.0 released a report "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations & Government Agencies." Green 2.0 is dedicated to increasing racial diversity across mainstream environmental NGOs, foundations and government agencies. Its report was authored by Dorceta E. Taylor, professor at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment. (She was the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.)

This [comprehensive report](#) surveyed 191 environmental non-profits, 74 government environmental agencies, and 28 leading environmental grant-making foundations to investigate their gender and racial diversity composition, the majority of which state diversification as a "value." The study also included confidential interviews of 21 environmental leaders from diverse backgrounds and experience.

The conclusions were far from cheerful.

Despite increasing diversity in the country, the racial composition of these organizations has not broken a 12-16 percent "green ceiling," in place for decades. These institutions have failed to keep pace with the expanding minority populations, and they remain overwhelmingly white.

In one example, the paid staff members of large NGOs are 88 percent white, with their boards 95 percent white.

Taylor wrote that an "unconscious bias" persists in these groups, preserving a racially homogeneous workplace. "This makes it difficult for ethnic minorities, the working class, or anyone outside of traditional environmental networks to find out about job openings and apply for those jobs."

But it may not simply be an issue of minority hiring, as discussed in the report. It may be a functioning endless loop of vocabulary, assumptions, and cultural interests that keeps the door only cracked open, the ceiling as low as it is.

As Black, Latino, and Asian advocates sought to join environmental organizations to address irresponsible power plants, refineries, railroads, sewage-treatment facilities, and other possible polluters operating in or near their communities, they found that they were unwelcome in an "environmental movement that had been white and upper middle-class," the report said.

Moreover, according to the report, efforts to attract and retain people of color have been "lackluster," across the environmental movement. The report asserts, convincingly, that mainstream NGO, foundation, and government agency respondents show an unwillingness to participate in needed initiatives to change the *status quo*.

Issues motivating these institutions are perceived as remote in two ways: geographically and ideologically.

It's a situation where minorities who want to focus on work toward communities and away from issues that are perceived as "wilderness" are often dismissed, even shunned.

A number of modest recommendations are made in the report, including one that stresses the development of an "ability to communicate across race, class, gender, and cultural lines."

In the area of gender, however, the report takes note of real advances, where women have made significant progress in these institutions. But the gender gap, the report indicated, was closed by hiring women who are largely white.

Little in the way of a geographic or policy "middle ground" is recommended in the report, however, Places and issues which are both meaningful and which can also appeal to a broad American audience to take us forward would be helpful. These concerns might focus more closely around outdoor recreation, health, sustainability, smart energy, access to green spaces, nature appreciation, and linking to formal educational curricula. That would be a good start. Otherwise, another report in 10 years on the same subject might very well provide the same sort of sober description.

Words to Consider:

"A hallmark of a healthy community is the democratic distribution of information and opportunity."

- Harry Wiland and Dale Bell, *Edens Lost & Found* (2006)

GBP Bulletin Archives

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