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## Extinct Birds

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## REVIEWS

Florida Field Naturalist 17(2): 49, 1989.

**A birdwatcher's cookbook.**—Erma J. Fisk. 1987. W. W. Norton & Co., New York City. ISBN 0-393-02502-0. 264 pp. Cloth, \$15.95.—“Jonnie” Fisk has written a thoroughly readable, enjoyable book: part cookbook, part journal of a birdwatcher. Anyone who wants to know what it is like to be a birdwatcher, or a cook for a group of birdwatchers, can find out in this small, well-illustrated volume. Included are more than just the standard recipes for meat, chicken, vegetable and soup dishes. By applying the lessons taught by Jonnie, one can learn to prepare such exotic foods as sparrow pie, fried rabbit, roast armadillo, goat stew, fried grasshopper and English monkey (actually a rarebit). Jonnie says, however, that she has never cooked a Canada Goose.

Ms. Fisk tells the reader how the annual Christmas Bird Count began, and how in the South, black-eyed peas bring good luck if eaten at New Year's. She includes story after story about the birders she has known and fed.

We travel with her to many places: the north-eastern United States, south Florida, Arizona, as well as to tropical islands, Ecuador, and even to the tiny kitchen behind the Francis Scott Key bookshop in Georgetown.

Herb lore is included: thyme is good for hangovers, dill for insomnia; elderberry branches over the door keep away devils and witches and parsley will cure anything.

In the first chapter the author tells us that “this cookbook . . . presupposes a woman, or man, to whom cooking is a pleasure and hobby as well as a necessity. . . .” How well this little volume illustrates that point! I heartily recommend this book to cooks, birders and anyone who wants to settle down for a “good read.”—Sue Steinberg, 5522 Riviera Drive, Coral Gables, Florida 33146.

Florida Field Naturalist 17(2): 49-51, 1989.

**Extinct birds.**—Errol Fuller. 1987. Facts On File Publications. ISBN 0-8160-1833-2. 256 pp., 55 color plates. \$35.00.—Birds have experienced extinction ever since they split off from their primitive reptilian ancestors about 200 million years ago. For example, about 25% of the Pleistocene avifauna became extinct due to major climatic changes (Brodkorb, P. 1960. How many species of birds have existed? Bull. Fla. State Mus. 6: 41-53). However, Errol Fuller is concerned with modern day extinctions in this book. Fuller is a writer and an artist who paints mostly modern human themes in his native England. He has authored a study of birds of paradise, and a monograph on the kiwis is to be published soon.

In the preface, Fuller details his reason for writing this book: though monographs exist on certain species (e.g., Dodo, Passenger Pigeon), no book is devoted to all the world's recently extinct birds since the out of date Rothschild's “Extinct Birds” of 1907 and Greenway's “Extinct and Vanishing Birds of the World” of 1958. Since 1600, about 75 known species of birds have been lost. Fuller vacillates in the case of some very rare birds that have not been seen for a considerable time. For example, the Cherry-throated Tanager known from only a single specimen collected in 1870, is listed as *not* extinct because of the remoteness of its native terrain and possible secretive nature.

This book has more than 135 illustrations, with 55 in color. Most of the extinct species are illustrated with color plates from archival sources (Audubon, Keulemans, Wolf, Lear), but the black and white line drawings (especially the fine lithographs of the ratites and Dodo) are equally appealing and interesting. Though lacking the fine detail of other mediums, Fuller's six oil paintings included in this book demonstrate a fine natural history skill. With the inclusion of photography, we enter the recent modern day extinctions of birds (e.g., Laysan Millerbird, Laysan Honeycreeper, Passenger Pigeon).

The organization and presentation of the book are appealing and successful. A detailed content page includes a list of the avian species to be discussed, followed by a list of illustrators, a forward by Miriam Rothschild, and a preface by Fuller. The main text is followed by bibliographic notes of some artists, illustrators, and naturalists; a 366-citation bibliography; and an index. The main text occupies the right 2/3 of the page, with additional information in the form of tables, lists, illustrations, or figure captions placed in the left 1/3 column. However, I found the occasional full or mostly blank 1/3 left column distracting and wasteful.

Chapters 1-17 are organized by orders or related groups (e.g., ratites). The introduction for each chapter often includes a table on the taxonomy of rare, endangered, and extinct species. Also included are accounts of subspecies that have been extirpated, which are particularly useful in understanding the rate and susceptibility of some of these avian groups to future extinction. I especially liked the discussion of the Rallidae (rails, crakes, coots, and gallinules). A rather lengthy introduction to the Passeriformes is on a family basis, due to the great number and variety of species. Afterwards, each extinct species is listed and described. Often the behavior and ecology of the extinct species is poorly known and descriptions are vague when based only on skeletal material (e.g., ratites). The exact dates of extinction also are indefinite since many species disappeared between visits by naturalists.

The narrative for each species, often in anecdotal style (e.g., naturalist Steller's unfortunate fate in the discussion of the Spectacled Cormorant), includes both known and speculative information. Fuller has done his research. He often has to resolve problematic sightings, descriptions, confusing taxonomy, and species accounts. In some cases, a described extinct species is now regarded as an extirpated subspecies, hybrid, or geographic morph. However, this still points out that species often lose large parts of their population including morphologically distinct subspecies. Today, we realize the importance of these genotypes and the significance of locally adapted populations to the overall gene pool and vigor of the species.

From the species accounts, it appears rails, pigeons and doves, and island passerines (especially the Hawaiian Islands) have suffered the greatest amount of extinction. I read with great interest the accounts of the Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon, and Carolina Parakeet, but was mildly disappointed that no mention was made of the fate of the Dusky Seaside Sparrow. The account of the Carolina Parakeet could use some of the information contained in Daniel McKinley's fine monograph (1985). The Carolina Parakeet in Florida. Gainesville, Florida: Florida Ornithological Society Spec. Publ. no. 2). Except for a few species, the reasons for the decline and extinction can be attributed to human impacts (e.g., over collecting and hunting; introduction of predators such as cats, dogs, rats; and habitat destruction). Surprisingly, Fuller lists no recent extinctions among the tinamous, penguins, loons, or grebes despite their easy access, poor flight characteristics, or desirability for their meat or eggs. However, an attempt to locate the Atitlan Grebe (listed as the Giant Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus gigas* in table 2) in Guatemala was unsuccessful during 1986-1987 (Hunter, L. A. 1988. *Condor* 90: 906-912). Though there are several thousand species of passerines, less than 30 are known to have become extinct. However, many species are rare and endangered or some populations have experienced extirpation.

Chapter 18 is a curious and intriguing account of hypothetical species and mystery birds. These include poorly known species, often described from a single or few specimens, or parts (i.e., a few feathers, partial skins). Under so-called mystery birds, they may be represented by rare, hybrids of two species. For example, interbreeding among the 40 species of birds of paradise may have produced 24 hybrids originally described as species or subspecies (Table 22). Hypothetical species, for which no specimens exist, often were given species status based on field notebooks of early naturalists and collectors, partial skeletal remains, or secondary descriptions from natives. It would be easy to dismiss these hypothetical species if it were not for the steady stream of new species of birds (albeit

small, secretive forest species) being described yearly from South America (see recent issues of the *Wilson Bulletin*).

I recommend this book by Fuller. It will intrigue you as to what is known and the missed opportunities to gain more information about these species that are gone forever. If one can enjoy reading about extinction and man's inhumanity to wildlife, then Fuller has succeeded in his attempt to educate and arouse us. Currently over 240 bird species are listed as endangered in the "Red Data Book" (King, W. B. 1981. *Endangered Birds of the World: The ICBP Red Data Book*. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Inst. Press). In a grim conclusion to his preface, Fuller notes that the next such volume on extinct birds in 15-20 years will be too large for a single, comprehensive volume as this book, because "There will be just too many extinct species!" Let us hope he is wrong and the many endangered and threatened species, especially in Florida (e.g., Wood Stork, Snail Kite, Grasshopper Sparrow, Scrub Jay, Crested Caracara), will not be included in the next book on extinct birds.—**James A. Rodgers Jr.**, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 4005 South Main Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601.

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## REPORT

**FOS records committee report.**—This is the fourth report of the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee, covering 1986. It contains 18 records of which 15 were accepted and 3 were not accepted. One record (86-104) was withdrawn.

Sightings of rare birds in Florida should be submitted to the current secretary of Records Committee. All records published thus far have been placed in a permanent file in the FOS Archives at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville where they are available for research. Documentation for birds listed in this report were submitted by: Sybil Arbery, Lyn Atherton, James Cavanaugh, Robert Flores, Wally George, Brian Hope, H. P. Langridge, John LaVia, Dan Lipman, Keith MacVicar, Bruce Neville, Cynthia Plockelman, Keith Rott, P. William Smith, Brian Specht, Henry Stevenson, Paul Sykes, Tadziu Trotsky, and Tom Yurchenco.—**Helen P. Dowling**, Secretary, 203 Tumblyn Kling Road, Ft. Pierce, Florida 34982.