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## THE PASSING OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON

By H. P. IJAMS

The passing of the Passenger Pigeon represents one of the saddest pages in the history of the bird life in this country. More interest is evidenced in its history and its fate than in that of any other North American bird. Its story reads like romance. Once the most abundant species ever known in any country, ranging over the greater part of this continent from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada in flocks so great that they hid the face of the sun, it has vanished from the face of the earth, leaving us only a few mute specimens in museums and private collections to remind us of its sad end, and to serve as a warning of what happens when no thought is given to the preservation of wild life.

The first settlers in this country found the Passenger Pigeon in infinite numbers. They provided a source of food for the Indians. Wherever roosts were established Indians always gathered in great numbers. Early historians speak of flocks of them so great that they broke down trees in the woods where they roosted. Early settlers in Virginia found the pigeons "beyond number or imagination." Their flights in migration extended over vast tracts of country. A continuous stream of pigeons, three miles wide, that it took three days to pass a given point, was observed as late as 1860. Audubon and Alexander Wilson, the father of American ornithology, record instances of observing the flights of more than 2,000,000,000 pigeons in one flock. These birds traveled at a rate of a mile a minute and the light of noonday was often obscured as by an eclipse.

The migrations of these birds was not the regular, long-drawn-out movements that characterized the sensational flights of most birds. They were undertaken chiefly in search of food which consisted mainly of wild berries, nuts, insects and grain. They were so swift and tireless in flight that they could pass from zone to zone in a day. They migrated en masse. That is, the birds of one great nesting or roosting place rose into the air as one body and the movement of these immense hosts formed the most wonderful and impressive spectacle in animated nature.

There were stirring sights when great herds of grazing animals thundered over the Western plains, but the approach of the mighty armies of the air was appalling. The vast multitudes, rising strata upon strata, covered and darkened the sky, hiding the sun, while the roar of their myriad wings was likened to that of a hurricane. Thus they passed for hours or days, while the people in the territory over which the pigeons winged their way kept up a fusillade from every point of vantage. Where lower flights passed close to the hilltops, people were stationed with guns, poles, rocks and other weapons to knock down the swarming birds. At night their roosting places were raided and thousands killed. For weeks after the passage of a flock the people in some sections fed on no other flesh than pigeons.

Their winter roosting places almost defy description, says Audubon. He rode through one on the banks of Green River in Kentucky for more than 40 miles, crossing it in different directions, and found its average width to be

more than three miles. The ground was white with droppings like snow; trees two feet in diameter were broken off. When the birds came in at sundown there was a great uproar and confusion, and a crackling of falling limbs not unlike a storm. On April 17, 1810, Alexander Wilson visited a roost in this same region and found that the birds were nesting in vast numbers, the nests holding young at the time. This was one of the most southerly nesting colonies of which we have been able to find record.

The nesting places sometimes were equal in size to the roosting places, frequently covering 100,000 to 150,000 acres. As many as 50 nests were observed in a single tree. The females laid one to two eggs, and were generally believed to raise more than one brood in a season. The squabs were in greater demand for food than the older birds, and for this reason raids were made upon their nesting places and the young slaughtered by the millions. In some places hogs were fattened upon the butchered squabs and older birds left on the ground after a raid. The most destructive implement was the net, to which birds were attracted by bait. Gunners also baited the birds with grain and dozens were frequently killed at a single shot.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, hundreds of men made a profession of following the birds wherever they went. They kept up with their movements by telegraph and moved to each new location as rapidly as possible. It required fifteen tons of ice to pack the squabs killed in the last great slaughter recorded in New York State. In the seventies it was said that the New York market alone consumed 100 barrels of pigeons a day for weeks without a break in price. It was this market demand that brought about the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon. When they began to become scarce the Indians raised objection to the way they were being slaughtered, and many tribes did everything in their power to prevent their total destruction, even using threats where pleading did not avail. The destruction of a large part of the young each year was what hastened the end. Nature cut off the rest with old age.

The last great slaughter was in 1878 at Petoskey, Michigan, when more than 1,500,000 birds were killed and shipped to market and perhaps as many more wounded birds and young squabs perished as a result. Over 2,000 people were at the nesting place, engaged in the business of trapping, killing and shipping pigeons. One Michigan firm reported the shipment of five cars a day to the New York market over a period of thirty days. In two years one authority says over twelve billion were killed and shipped to market from one town in Michigan, while another section contributed sixteen million. Another town killed and shipped over \$4,000,000 worth.

The 1878 slaughter was a blow from which the Pigeons never recovered. A much smaller breeding colony was recorded near Grand Traverse, Mich., in 1881, and the same wholesale slaughter for market purposes was carried out. After 1881, only scattering flocks were seen, and from that time onward the diminution of the birds was continuous until they became extinct.

William Brewster visited Michigan in 1888 to investigate a reported reappearance of the birds there and learned that small scattered flocks had passed northward into Canada during late April. Their nesting place of that year was never found, and the theory has been advanced that late snowstorms in this northerly latitude may have wiped out the remnant that remained. Major Charles Bendire, writing in 1892, said: "The extermination of the Passenger Pigeon has progressed so far during the past twenty years that it looks now as if their extermination would be accomplished within the present century." His prediction came true. Ben-

dire further records that the Pigeons did not always breed in colonies, and that their distribution in isolated pairs, through the North, was comparable with the Mourning Dove of the present day. Men had formed the habit of killing Pigeons on sight, however, and these isolated pairs were soon shot out as the country settled up.

The ruthless destruction of these species had much to do with the passing of our present game laws. No adequate attempt to protect them was made until they had virtually disappeared. Whenever a law looking toward the conservation of these birds was proposed in any state, its opponents argued before legislative committees that the Pigeons "needed no protection;" that their numbers were so vast and that they ranged over such a great extent of country, that they were amply able to take care of themselves. Where laws were passed, they were not enforced.

Audubon, in describing the dreadful slaughter of these birds at one time, said that people unacquainted with them might naturally conclude that such destruction would soon put an end to the species; but he was satisfied himself, by long observation, that nothing but the gradual diminution of the forests could accomplish the decrease of the birds.

The enormous multitudes of the Pigeons made such an impression upon the mind that the extinction of the species seemed an absolute impossibility. Nevertheless, it has occurred. In 1878 the Cincinnati Zoological Garden bought three pairs of Pigeons. They hatched and raised several young. Then the old ones started to die off, as did some of the young, and finally only two were left, a male and a female. The male died in 1910 and the female in 1914, at the age of 29 years. The last bird to die was presented to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington.

In 1910 the Zoological Garden offered \$100 for a pair and in 1914 the offer was increased to \$1,000, but no one ever claimed the reward. So in thirty years the most numerous of all birds in the country vanished. The last record we have of a Passenger Pigeon being killed in the wild state occurred in 1908.

Knoxville, Tenn.

(NOTE.—In a later number we hope to present an article dealing with the former occurrence of Passenger Pigeons in Tennessee. Information from our members on this subject is solicited.—Editor.)



## THE RED-TAILED HAWK

By HARRY S. VAUGHN

Possibly the most maligned of all Tennessee birds is the Red-tailed Hawk, the largest member of the hawk family. As a matter of fact it is quite peaceable with other species of birds except perhaps in the vicinity of its nest. It is rather easy to identify, due to its large size, mode of flight and shape of wing, even though you do not get a glimpse of the brick red color on the upper surface of the tail. This red is quite noticeable when the birds are soaring, particularly if the sun is shining. During each circle which the bird makes there is a point where the tail is turned enough so that the observer can see its upper surface. Until the young birds are a year old, however, their tails remain a dusky gray.

The food of the Red-tail consists chiefly of young rabbits, squirrels, cliff rats, mice, snakes, frogs and lizards. Only rarely does it molest poultry, despite the fact that many country folks know it by the name of "Chicken Hawk." Among those who are more discerning, however, the























