

Extinction of the Passenger Pigeons

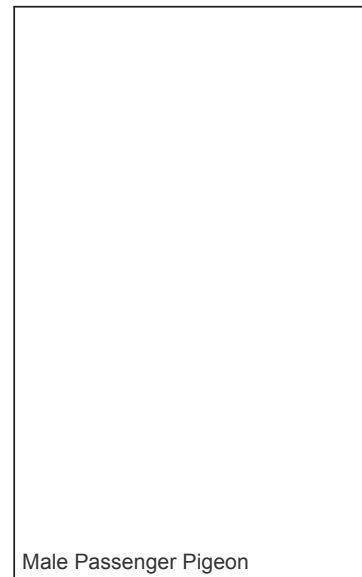
Article #230, written by [Anthony Kendall](#)

Passenger Pigeons (*Ectopistes Migratorius*) were once so numerous that by some estimates they outnumbered all the rest of the birds in North America combined. The swift birds were capable of flying in excess of 60 miles per hour, and frequently migrated hundreds of miles in search of suitable grounds for nesting and feeding. Yet their speed and mobility were no match for the advancing settlers of 19th-century America. In less than a century, the most numerous bird on the planet was completely eliminated from the wild by a ruthless campaign of eradication.

The story of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon is a dark one. It is a tale, like that of the American Bison, of the dangers of uncontrolled hunting and wanton extermination. It also chronicles the expansion of a new nation, the limitless vision of the Victorian Age, and the conquering of the American wilderness. But sadly, it mostly details what happens when a species that is uniquely and exquisitely adapted to its environment meets a predator equally well adapted to slaughter.

When the first European settlers arrived at St. Augustine, Florida in 1565, it is believed that between 3 and 6 *billion* Passenger Pigeons darkened the skies over eastern North America. This vast host was supported by nearly continuous chestnut, birch, oak, maple, and pine forests the size of Western Europe. The pigeons feasted on the bountiful nuts of those trees and nested in their thick branches.

Passenger Pigeons were unique in the world not only because of the vast numbers, but also because of the manner in which they roosted, nested, flocked, and migrated. The great American naturalist John James Audubon wrote this account of the passing of a flock of what he later estimated to be more than 1 billion pigeons in the Fall of 1813:



Male Passenger Pigeon

“As I traveled on, the air was literally filled with pigeons. The light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse, and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my senses. Before sunset I reached Louisville, Kentucky. The pigeons passed in undiminished number, and continued to do so for three days in succession. The people were all in arms. The banks of the Ohio were crowded with men and boys, incessantly shooting at the pilgrims, which flew lower as they passed over the river. Multitudes were thus destroyed. For a week or more, the population fed on no flesh other than of pigeons, and talked of nothing but pigeons.”

Passenger Pigeons seemed to have evolved a survival strategy based on predator satiation. The birds nested in the northern forests each spring and summer where a pair would raise just a single offspring each mating. After a few weeks of continuous feeding, the parents would force their fattened youngster (called a squab) from the nest to the ground where it remained until first flight a few days later. In a large colony, hundreds of millions of squabs littered the forest floor helpless to their many

predators. But the local populations of foxes, wolves, bears, boars, birds, snakes, rodents and other creatures that feasted on the squabs could eat only a small fraction of the squabs before they flew away. The next year, that colony would find a different nesting site: the Passenger Pigeon was the most ephemeral of prey.

The gigantic colonies may have moved from site to site not because of predators, but because of their effect on their nesting and roosting grounds. Larger colonies covered anywhere between 30 and 850 square miles. Descriptions of those sites indicated that nearly every tree in the area supported a nest, and some had as many as 500 nests. Under such weight tree branches collapsed and trunks more than 2 feet in diameter were snapped off at the base. The droppings of the birds blanketed the forest floor and killed the understorey. Even the most productive forests could support such a brood for a few months at most.

Their prime food source were the plentiful acorns, chestnuts, beech nuts, and hickory nuts that littered the forest floor. But as their forests were logged to provide land and timber for the rapidly expanding US population, they became agricultural pests, and their slaughter was officially supported by local, state, and federal governments. Not that folks needed much encouragement. Eastern palates had developed a taste for the cheap and plentiful pigeon meat; and Southern slaves, when they received any meat at all, were almost exclusively given pigeon. Their feathers stuffed pillows and mattresses and were used for decoration and fashion. And of course the pigeons were shot for sport, both in the wild and in carnival booths where the docile birds proved easy targets.

It didn't take long for a group of professional pigeoners to emerge that helped meet the vast demand for pigeons and their fatty squabs. These men—whose numbers are estimated to have

been between several hundred and a few thousand—tracked the nomadic pigeon colonies across the US. Later in the century, they made use of the fledgling telegraph technology to locate their swiftly-traveling prey.

Their tactics were brutal but efficient. Boys used long sticks to knock the birds and their young from nests where they were then clubbed as they rained down. Fire and sulphur were used to suffocate the birds as they roosted. Live pigeons with eyes sewn shut were also used as decoys to attract other pigeons (they were called “stools”, hence the phrase “stool pigeon”). Of course the shotgun was an ever-popular option. One published account quoted a man who recalled shooting blindly into a tree at night and collecting 18 birds. Migrating flocks provided a steady stream of birds that flew so close that 50 could be brought down with a single blast. When the bounty proved too much for a single man or even a single town to use, hogs were loosed to clean the ground of dead pigeons and helpless chirping squabs.

The pigeons were killed where they nested, where they roosted, where they fed, and as they flew. They were pursued and harried from town to town and state to state. By the mid 19th-century their numbers had noticeably declined, and by 1880 commercial hunting was no longer profitable. But because of the peculiar habits of the Passenger Pigeon, hunting proved easy and plentiful right until the end. Indeed, their final big season was to be their most successful ever.

In the summer of 1878, the last large breeding colony of Pigeons arrived near Crooked Lake in Petosky, Michigan. The flock covered 40 square miles and for three months yielded over 50,000 birds a day to hunters. One hunter reportedly killed 3,000,000 of the birds and [according to one account](#) earned \$60,000—more than \$1 million in today’s dollars. All told, between 10 and 15 million birds were dressed, packed for sale, and shipped out of Petoskey that summer. Estimates of the total number slaughtered vary widely but agree that the harvest rate was upwards of 90%. Though moderate-sized colonies nested in Michigan in 1881, the bird was never again spotted in that state after 1889.

In 1896, the last remaining flock of Passenger Pigeons settled down to nest. All 250,000 were exterminated in one day by sportsmen who gathered to kill what was advertised as the last wild flock of the birds. Fully aware of the rarity of the species, a 14-year-old boy in Ohio shot the last wild pigeon in the spring of 1900.

All efforts at breeding in captivity failed. The Passenger Pigeon reproduced slowly, had odd mating habits that prevented crossbreeding, and were seemingly incapable of breeding within their species outside of large colonies. One by one, pigeons in captivity died without producing offspring. Finally on September 1st, 1914 the last Passenger Pigeon fell off her perch and died. Martha had lived to be 29. She was frozen in ice and shipped to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington where she was

skinned and stuffed. She remains there on display. Reports of sightings continued into the 1930s, but despite hefty rewards, none were confirmed.

A Young Martha

Though it was a shameful deed, it was more than simply human hunting that doomed the Passenger Pigeon: it was our very presence. Its cousin, the Mourning Dove, is better adapted to living with humans and is so numerous that 30 million are killed each year with little threat to the remaining 400 million. The unfortunate truth is that had the Passenger Pigeon not been hunted to extinction, it probably could not have survived without the vast forests that supported its great colonies. Those forests no longer exist, and though they are growing back in some areas, they are much smaller and more fragmented. It seems that the Passenger Pigeons are no more compatible with modern man than were the forests that they called home.

Additional Info:

[The Passenger Pigeon: Once There Were Billions](#) an essay by Jerry Sullivan

[Wikipedia entry on the Passenger Pigeon](#)

[Feathered Farewell](#) an essay by Perry Stambaugh

[The Passenger Pigeon](#) an essay by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye excerpted from *The Birder's Handbook*

[Buy The Passenger Pigeon: Its History and Extinction on Amazon](#)

[Buy The Silent Sky: The Incredible Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon on Amazon](#) (thanks Genevieve)

Related Articles:

[The Intrepid Pigeoneers](#)

[The Norwegian Puffin Dog](#)

[It Was Just an 11 Million Year Vacation](#)



Written by [Anthony Kendall](#), posted on 28 June 2006. Anthony is a contributing editor for [DamnInteresting.com](#).

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Sen.McCarthy

Am I a bad person if this article made me hungry?

Posted 28 June 2006 at 10:09 pm



Mad Cow

Wow, I remember hearing about these guys in a zoology class in high school, but the in-depth story is even sadder. A full blown flock must have been a sight to see, although I hate to think what would happen to a freshly washed car as they would pass over. Certainly DI.

Posted 28 June 2006 at 10:17 pm



Genevieve

Allan Eckert wrote a book called [The Silent Sky: The Incredible Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon](#). Well worth reading.

Posted 28 June 2006 at 11:33 pm



Arcangel

Well this article just reaffirms my belief that hunters have no brains or at least don't know how to use them. Your Ivory Billed Woodpecker story has the same sad story. It casts a dark shadow on mankind.

Posted 28 June 2006 at 11:33 pm



cutterjohn

I'm less than sympathetic towards the plight of pigeons, especially ones wit habits as destructive as this. Nobody sheds a tear for the wanton slaughter of ants or termites when an exterminator is called to clear homes of infestations. This is no different.

Posted 28 June 2006 at 11:46 pm



cutterjohn

Arcangel said: "Well this article just reaffirms my belief that hunters have no brains or at least don't know how to use them. Your Ivory Billed Woodpecker story has the same sad story. It casts a dark shadow on mankind."

Ignorance comes in all shapes and sizes.

"Pheasants Forever got its start in Iowa with the creation of the Iowa Pioneer (north central Iowa) chapter in 1984. Since that time, Pheasants Forever has grown to 102 chapters and more than 19,000 members in Iowa. In fact, Pheasants Forever has raised more than \$20 million for Iowa's wildlife habitat, which has resulted in Iowa chapters completing over 68,000 habitat projects benefiting over 638,000 acres since 1984. Iowa chapters have also planted over 8.5 million shrubs, conifers, and bushes for shelter belts and participated in 400 land acquisitions totaling 51,253 acres since 1984. All Pheasants Forever land acquisitions are accomplished in partnership with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and county conservation boards. Land acquisitions are then opened to the public for hunting and other compatible outdoor recreation activities."

I've personally been a member now for over 8 years, along with my brothers, and between us, our farm has donated 100 acres of land to wildlife and public hunting reserves, and planted another 175 acres of CRP, to say nothing of our monetary donations. We aren't the exception either. A great number of wildlife conservation groups are composed of hunters.

What have you done to help our nations wildlife, and preserve it for future generations to enjoy?

Posted 28 June 2006 at 11:59 pm



gorgeousplanet

cutterjohn: by enjoy do you mean kill?? why do you have to hunt and give money to the cause? can't you just give? and since when has the exterminator caused ants or termites to go extinct?? do you even have any idea how ridiculous that statement was?

Posted 29 June 2006 at 12:32 am



Counter-Strike

Yet another article that proves the existence of god. DI !

Posted 29 June 2006 at 01:43 am



Byrden

It's encouraging that a species numbering 6 billion can still be wiped out. Maybe there's hope for the planet after all.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 02:32 am



cutterjohn

gorgeousplanet said: "cutterjohn: by enjoy do you mean kill?? why do you have to hunt and give money to the cause? can't you just give? and since when has the exterminator caused ants or termites to go extinct?? do you even have any idea how ridiculous that statement was?"

Sure i could just give. But i enjoy hunting. Theres no have to about it. And anyone is free to enjoy public lands anytime of the year, though i would recomend avoiding it during the hunting seasons(not a major problem since iowa isn't know for its hospitable winters, when most of the seasons occur).

And there is a very close similarity between the extinction of the passenger pigeon and the extermination of household pests such as ants and termites. Back in the 1800's passenger pigeons WERE pests. They ravaged vast tracks of land, and would litter towns with filth as they flew overhead on their migrations.

I agree that that final hunt which decimated the remaining population was a travesty, and should never be repeated, but i also realize that they didn't know the pigeons

were nearly extinct at the time.. those pigeons, while useful as food and for feathers, were an infestation, a blight on the land, and were systematically cleared because of it.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 02:59 am



Prince

Sen.McCarthy said: "Am I a bad person if this article made me hungry?"

yes

Posted 29 June 2006 at 03:50 am



Prince

Imagine the thoughts going through the head of that 14year old as he shot the last wild passenger pigeon. (why are they called passenger pigeons?)

Posted 29 June 2006 at 03:52 am



errna

Another damn interesting read, I've never heard of this...

Just one thing though, and I hate to be a spoil-sport – palettes? and sitings? Ehem...

Posted 29 June 2006 at 04:01 am



Marius

This story has me internally divided. On the one hand, it's yet another example of the shortsightedness and brutality of the human race, but on the other hand it seems to be Darwinism in action. As much as we like to pretend that we are somehow outside of nature, we are part of nature, the top predator, and the Passenger Pigeon simply could not adapt to coexistence with us. I also think we have to use some sort of temporal context when judging those hunters past. The sensibilities and mores of those early Americans were very different than ours today. They didn't have supermarkets, and nicely disguised animal flesh to eat. To them hunting was a way of life, so using that as a way to eliminate what they viewed as a scourge was not that great a leap. They didn't have the luxury of pitying the animals they killed. I am no hunter, and what I have seen of slaughterhouses disgusts me, but I still love a good burger. We humans have always had the ability to mentally disconnect from that which we would rather not see.

Wow, that sort of rambled a bit. Sorry.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 04:08 am



lledra

The poor pigeons.

I had no idea that there were *that* many. It's sad, that they all died, that they befell the same fate as the Dodo. Though the 2 be different, their fate was ultimately the same. They met man.

I have to agree with Marius though, with the Passenger Pigeon not being able to coexist with us.

Hell, if I woke up early enough, I could look out from my mothers balcony and see Deer and Foxes on the Golf course across the street. And she lived in a city. (Oakville is full of plants and forest... SO COOL for biking)

I suppose the old saying could be applied here too. Though it was used initially for something totally different.

"If your not with us, your against us"

Posted 29 June 2006 at 04:32 am



Anthony Kendall

If I were given a time machine and a single chance to use it, I would go back to the 17th century and explore the Chestnut forests of the Appalachians. I would stand under the 1-acre canopies of those enormous ancient trees and hopefully catch a glimpse of a flock of passenger pigeons or maybe even a Carolina Parakeet. Enormous trees, amazing birds, and the wolves, bears, and river otters of the *wilderness* are what I miss. I live in Michigan, and the role of my state's residents in this extinction story saddens me.

The Chestnut forests are gone because international trade brought a fungus in that kills them. Passenger Pigeons are gone mostly because humans are incapable of living harmoniously with any wildlife that gets our attention. Darwinism does not apply to cultural actions. It's not Evolution that killed the Passenger Pigeon, it's man. We can't wash the blood of baby seals off our hands by saying that we are the greater predator. We kill them, like we killed many of the Passenger Pigeons for decoration and sport.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 05:33 am



another viewpoint

Prince said: "Imagine the thoughts going through the head of that 14year old as he shot the last wild passenger pigeon. (why are they called passenger pigeons?)"

Thoughts...there were no thoughts going through that head. Then again, the problem was not the last pidgeon...but the second to the last pidgeon...assuming the last two pidgeons were one each, male and female. So much for a species.

...now, let't make sure the plight of the red headed, double-breasted, mattress thrasher, doesn't go the same way as the passenger pidgeon or the dodo bird. Thank you very much!

Posted 29 June 2006 at 06:44 am



LL

Counter-Strike said: "Yet another article that proves the existence of god. DI !"

How so?

I fail to see how this, or any other article either prove or disprove the existence of a god.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 07:37 am



Bobt250

While there are merits to all the arguments above I find myself just plain sad about this story. Profoundly sad to be honest. The pic of Martha made me sad too. I can't really explain it.....It's not just a bird it's an entire species.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 07:37 am



1c3d0g

You know, when I read stories like this, it really makes me ashamed to be part of this so-called Human race. The arrogance of humanity never ceases to amaze me. Poor harmless animals being clubbed to death, their eyes sewn shut? What the hell?!? Disgusting! I truly believe some people have shit for brains...they should be taken out back and shot! >:|

Posted 29 June 2006 at 07:42 am



redinc07

1c3d0g said: "You know, when I read stories like this, it really makes me ashamed to be part of this so-called Human race. The arrogance of humanity never ceases to amaze me. Poor harmless animals being clubbed to death, their eyes sewn shut? What the hell?!? Disgusting! I truly believe some people have shit for brains...they should be taken out back and shot! >:]"

Pretty hypocritical to say of you, and i dont even know you. I'm sure you've stepped on a bug, squashed some ants, or swatted some flies. You're probably not even a vegetarian! :)

Posted 29 June 2006 at 08:16 am



kathaclysm

Marius says: This story has me internally divided. On the one hand, it's yet another example of the shortsightedness and brutality of the human race, but on the other hand it seems to be Darwinism in action.

I'll have to disagree with that, human actions are too swift and all-encompassing to provide for evolution. The only other things to act so swiftly and take out entire species on this planet are comets and viruses. I believe that humans are above evolution in that we can keep other humans alive beyond what would be naturally possible: surgery, vaccinations, and even transportation of goods like food prevent deaths across the world. Genetics alone cannot keep up with our progress as a species.

If we are messing with nature to keep members of our own species alive, then we also need to do so in the rest of the natural world.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 08:52 am



space-monkey

Sorry cutterjohn, couldn't resist: those pigeons... were an infestation, a blight on the land, and were systematically cleared because of it.

Isn't that the same rationale Agent Smith used in the Matrix for the enslavement of the human race? Besides that, I kind of feel the same way about the earth and its storms towards the human population.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 09:26 am



noway

Migrating flocks provided a steady stream of birds that flew so close that 50 could be brought down with a single blast.

I call BS on this.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 09:45 am



WolfManDragon

Ah, thrash the hunter day.

When I was a child, there were no wild Turkeys in my area. Now, due to the efforts of hunters, there is a plethora of turkeys nesting in these hills. Its the same story with deer and my father's generation.

Today's hunters are the biggest reason for the reintroduction of our native wildlife.

The Great Chestnut Blight was caused by a fungus (which is still active in the soil- the reason that the reintroduction of native Chestnut trees hasn't happened), but it is doubtful that it would have wiped out all the trees, if most of the Appalachians forests had not been a sylvan monoculture.

We are having the same problem now with pine beetles in forests that have a pine monoculture. WE have more knowledge now, and we are slowing down the spread of this infestation, perhaps even stop it. Time will tell.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:00 am



WolfManDragon

noway said: "I call BS on this."

There were 4 gauge muzzle loading shotguns of that era (moon-shiners liked those guns). Perhaps, under perfect conditions, with a LARGE gauge shotgun, it would be possible

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:05 am



WolfManDragon

Actually, I should have said small gauge, but that doesn't sound as cool.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:07 am



RichVR

So the article never explained how many passengers the average pigeon could carry.

Well??

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:13 am



Ironclaw

RichVR said: "So the article never explained how many passengers the average pigeon could carry.

Well??"

Passengers?..

...what about coconuts?

But in any case.. its probably not as much as the unladen swallow..

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:42 am



Anthony Kendall

noway,

Careless calling of "BS" is an indictment of the author's truthfulness, and is really annoying to an author who is scrupulous. To show that my statement is not BS, here are two citations:

From the *Feathered Farewell* essay: "a single shot could bring down 30 or 40 birds"

From a [google search](#): "Great pigeon shooting. Mr. Henry Keats recently shot 18 shots at 784 pigeons. They were on a sand bar where they had alighted for gravel and water." (Probably on the St. Joseph River)" That's an average of 43.6, some undoubtedly reached 50 killed per shot.

Though I can't seem to relocate the account, there was a description in which 50 were said to be killed in a single shot. So, this is as true as any hunter's or fisher's tale.

BTW, there are some really great resources on Passenger Pigeons on the web, though none as good as the two books linked to in 'Further Information':

[The Passenger Pigeon FAQ](#)

[Smithsonian Institute page on Passenger Pigeons](#)

Posted 29 June 2006 at 10:50 am



Earbird

“The people were all in arms. The banks of the Ohio were crowded with men and boys, incessantly shooting at the pilgrims, which flew lower as they passed over the river. Multitudes were thus destroyed”

Really? Wow! Dont remember hearing that in history class. And how were the pilgrims flying again?

Posted 29 June 2006 at 11:19 am



Ironclaw

Earbird said: “The people were all in arms. The banks of the Ohio were crowded with men and boys, incessantly shooting at the pilgrims, which flew lower as they passed over the river. Multitudes were thus destroyed”

Really? Wow! Dont remember hearing that in history class. And how were the pilgrims flying again?”

Well the mayflower really needed that 4 gage... I think they refered to that as grape shot – no?

Wood splinters everywhere ... imagine the carnage...

Posted 29 June 2006 at 11:21 am



jp6v

those pigeons... were an infestation, a blight on the land, and were systematically cleared because of it.

The original DI article doesn't delve into why there were so damn many passenger pigeons in the first place. Some wildlife ecologists have offered the following explanation (this comes from Charles Mann's "1491" article that was in The Atlantic a few years ago):

The "first European settlers" mentioned above arrived in 1565 but they weren't the first Europeans in the New World. Hernando de Soto, for instance, spent four years

exploring the southeast of the US and never saw hordes of bison yet a century later French explorers found vast herds in the same places.

The reason for the massive change? Early explorers like de Soto brought new diseases. In the decades between those first explorers and the arrival of the first settlers the diseases destroyed Native American populations. It is often said that man is the top of the food chain and it is true we are what is called a “keystone species”: our actions have tremendous reverberations throughout the entire ecological chain. As massive native die outs began that old ecological balance was upset.

“Food” species such as the bison and carrier pigeon began to breed out of control. Passenger pigeons were easy to kill and tasty to eat...yet pre-Colombian archeological digs show no evidence such evidence of natives feasting on flocks of billions of birds.

Before the European settlers there were no massive forests to support the pigeon: those forests were created by European settlers. Or rather, created when European explorers’ diseases killed off the natives who had been keeping the land clear. When the natives died the vast expanses of open space the first explorers noted began filling in with forest.

The massive pigeons flocks described above were “outbreak populations—always a symptom of an extraordinarily disrupted ecological system”.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 11:28 am



Ironclaw

Anthony Kendall said: “noway,

Careless calling of “BS” is an indictment of the author’s truthfulness, and is really annoying to an author who is scrupulous.

I think it was a challenge of veracity of the hunter’s original statment not to your truthfullness anthony.

Common sense does indicate that it seems like a improbably high number. Not impossible mind you, but definitely a tall challenge.

I did a quick google search on some typical bird shot loads and I am seeing numbers in the 200 pellets/shell range. I understand this varies, but given the claim of 50 birds in one shot given the normal choke dispersion pattern- I simply find it unlikely that 1/4 independant shot pellets found an independant bird.

So I would also tend to call the hunters claim "BS", but that in not ways impugns the merit of the story.

Just as a side, I wanted to thank all the authors that contribute here. Guys you are what makes this site fun.

-IC

Posted 29 June 2006 at 11:48 am



Kryndis

I have a question for the hunters and I apologize in advance if this sounds like some sort of indictment, it's not meant to be. I simply don't understand something and would appreciate it if you could help me to understand. Where does the enjoyment come from killing another living, breathing creature?

Yes, I do kill ants and other bugs in my house, but I take no joy from it. I perceive them as an invader to my home and kill them the same as every other creature on the planet would under those circumstances. The difference between myself and a hunter is that I don't go out on weekends looking through the forest for colonies of ants to kill for fun.

As for the article, it is indeed DI. I had known of the passenger pigeon though I never knew all the details. I do find the people who responded by saying that the passenger pigeon was a pest and that it deserved to be killed to be rather disturbing.

Extinction, no matter what the cause or circumstances, no matter whether man is involved or not, is always a sad event. The utter demise of an entire species should never be ignored, or worse, casually justified. It should be mourned and, hopefully, something we learn from so that it is never repeated.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 12:16 pm



Melon Head

Ironclaw said: "I think it was a challenge of veracity of the hunter's original statement not to your truthfulness anthony."

Common sense does indicate that it seems like a improbably high number. Not impossible mind you, but definitely a tall challenge.

I did a quick google search on some typical bird shot loads and I am seeing numbers in the 200 pellets/shell range. I understand this varies, but given the claim of 50 birds

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-IC"

Who's to say that more than one pellet didn't each kill more than one bird?

Also, I don't see how they could have been considered a blight. By whose definition?

I believe in a Creator; therefore, I feel strongly that we are here to have the Earth in subjection. That doesn't mean we are to destroy the Earth or the animals that inhabit it (although I do enjoy a good BBQ). A master, in the true sense, nurtures that over which he holds dominion. We really, really suck at being masters.

That having been said, "God" will bring to ruin those ruining the Earth.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 12:18 pm



another viewpoint

WolfManDragon said: "When I was a child, there were no wild Turkeys in my area. Now, due to the efforts of hunters, there is a plethora of turkeys nesting in these hills. Its the same story with deer and my father's generation. Today's hunters are the biggest reason for the reintroduction of our native wildlife."

...so that some day in the future, when the animals are over populated in that area and creating a nuisance, the hunters will have something to go out and shoot... whether that be for fun or game. Sounds like the perfect self-perpetuating program to me. Perhaps they should change the name from "hunter" to "Wildlife Targets 'R Us".

Posted 29 June 2006 at 01:02 pm



1c3d0g

redinc07 said: "Pretty hypocritical to say of you, and i dont even know you. I'm sure you've stepped on a bug, squashed some ants, or swatted some flies. You're probably not even a vegetarian! :)"

Huh? What crawled up your ass, boy? Look, when people purposely club animals to death for no valid reason or sew their eyes shut so they can kill even more animals, they have a serious mental problem. I will kill anyone who does that to one of my

animals. Not that that's likely going to happen, 'cause I have quite a few precautions in place to avoid it. But if it does happen, I will not hesitate to gun down those scumbags.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 01:23 pm



Anthony Kendall

jp6v,

Your comment is probably the most fascinating thing that I've heard in a long time. I ran a Lexis Nexis search, read the Atlantic Monthly article, and am now headed out to by "1491" by Charles Mann. The possibility of Passenger Pigeons, Bison herds, and enormous forests being a function of smallpox/etc. decimation of native peoples is simply astounding.

The historical and anthropological implications of this blow my mind. Thank you.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 01:26 pm



Duffalo

Marius makes a very compelling point: humans—like all other species—are the product of natural selection, and our actions are as “natural” as those of any other animal. (For that matter, changing climatic conditions and cataclysmic events such as volcanic eruptions and meteoric collisions are also “natural.”)

The hunter is both the instrument and the product of evolution, whether he uses his claws, teeth, or a shotgun to take down his quarry. Innumerable dominant species came and went before H. sapiens became a decisive factor, and to this sequence of events we owe our very existence.

If we, through ignorance, greed, or reproductive success, manage to create an environment that is inhospitable to us, this is still EVOLUTION. Another dominant species will proliferate under different conditions. It's a big waste of time to claim that we should protect wildlife because your God loves the current set of species more than he could possibly love the species that will replace them in the future.

Like any other “successful” species, we are lucky if we survive long enough to foul our environment with our own waste products and destroy each other in the competition for shrinking resources. The extinction of the passenger pigeon is sad because it reminds us that our own species can and will come to an end, but take heart! Something will thrive on our remains. Perhaps we'll power some other species' automobiles one day.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 01:52 pm



me09

palette=the colors used for a painting. Hmm, i guess colors liked to eat bird.
Interesting. Hey, can you imagine camping under the pigeon infested trees? hmm,
smells...nice

Posted 29 June 2006 at 03:06 pm



Marius

Hey, everyone, I never said that because this story smacked of Darwinism that I condoned the eradication of a species. I just found it odd that millions of other critters have learned to stay away from the two-legged thunderstick holders, while the Passenger Pigeons just kept looking at each other and saying, "Bob, did you hear something? Bob? Bob?"

Posted 29 June 2006 at 04:39 pm



Drakvil

jp6v said: ...

The "first European settlers" mentioned above arrived in 1565 but they weren't the first Europeans in the New World. Hernando de Soto, for instance, spent four years exploring the southeast of the US and never saw hordes of bison yet a century later French explorers found vast herds in the same places.

The reason for the massive change? Early explorers like de Soto brought new diseases. In the decades between those first explorers and the arrival of the first settlers the diseases destroyed Native American populations. It is often said that man is the top of the food chain and it is true we are what is called a "keystone species": our actions have tremendous reverberations througout the entire ecological chain. As massive native die outs began that old ecological balance was upset.

...

Before the European settlers there were no massive forests to support the pigeon: those forests were created by European settlers. Or rather, created when European explorers' diseases killed off the natives who had been keeping the land clear. When the natives died the vast expanses of open space the first explorers noted began filling in with forest.

Most of the stories (not all) about native populations being wiped out by small pox (especially the ones that Cortez came in contact with) are being called into question –

I read an article last year where historians are finding that when the first victims started falling to disease while Cortez was stomping around in Mexico, the Indians already had a long-established name for the disease: something they would not have for something that just arrived. This disease was referred to in written records that predated contact with the Spanish. It turns out that this was a disease carried by rodents, and when droughts struck the rodents would be driven to venture close to people, against their better judgement. Namely the Indian's food stores, and their droppings and feces would cause infection to be spread to the food supply. This was a recurring thing that struck them every so many years when there was a drought. Also, the people that dropped of illness while Cortez was doing his thing had symptoms that do not match that of small pox. I think it was Discover magazine that I read this account in.

I don't dispute that some people died from diseases brought from Europe, but a good percentage of what was attributed to European diseases actually died from native diseases that were helped on by primitive sanitary conditions and a limited diet that restrained some facets of their immune systems.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 05:27 pm



Drakvil

I also have a hard time with the concept that the native Americans were keeping the land clear. I don't think that their hunter-gatherer lifestyles would have had a large enough effect on the land to limit forestry. I could believe the cause being rats from the first ships changing the balance of wildlife, but not native American land clearing efforts.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 05:31 pm



k1one

i think i am going to cry now,... thanx.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 07:05 pm



joe_schmoe

“

The guy who wrote it said: "The banks of the Ohio were crowded with men and boys, incessantly shooting at the pilgrims, which flew lower as they passed over the river."

You meant the pigeons, right?

Posted 29 June 2006 at 07:32 pm



Anthony Kendall

joe_schmoe,

Audubon wrote "pilgrims" to mean the pigeons who were making a "pilgrimage" south to their winter roosting grounds. He was just using a more lyrical style in his descriptions. Much of Audubon's writing is as beautiful as the species that he observes: it's no wonder his legacy is so strong even to this day.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 08:29 pm



The Random Avenger

joe_schmoe said: You meant the pigeons, right?

I like pilgrims better.

Posted 29 June 2006 at 08:31 pm



Bolens

Do pilgrims taste like chicken?

Posted 29 June 2006 at 11:19 pm



Sen.McCarthy

Kryndis said: "I have a question for the hunters and I apologize in advance if this sounds like some sort of indictment, it's not meant to be. I simply don't understand something and would appreciate it if you could help me to understand. Where does the enjoyment come from killing another living, breathing creature?"

Yes, I do kill ants and other bugs in my house, but I take no joy from it. I perceive them as an invader to my home and kill them the same as every other creature on the planet would under those circumstances. The difference between myself and a hunter is that I don't go out on weekends looking through the forest for colonies of ants to kill for fun.

As for the article, it is indeed DI. I had known of the passenger pigeon though I never knew all the details. I do find the people who responded by saying that the passenger pigeon was a pest and that it deserved to be killed to be rather disturbing.

Extinction, no matter what the cause or circumstances, no matter whether man is involved or not, is always a sad event. The utter demise of an entire species should never be ignored, or worse, casually justified. It should be mourned and, hopefully, something we learn from so that it is never repeated."

Being a Southerner and occasional hunter (haven't done it in years, though), I would first like to say thanks for being respectful. It seems to me that for many of us, hunting is our way of saying that we are still as rugged as our forefathers, or something related to that.

Another reason is that we want something different. By that, I mean how we go to the store once or twice a week and pick up some meat and vegetables and such, then bring it back and store it in the refridgerator until we are hungry, or going to a restaurant where the food simply appears. Sometimes, enjoyment comes from making your food from the ground up.

But really, I think it appeals to man's primal instincts. Having a deer in the sights of a rifle with the finger slowly placing pressure the trigger and hearing the firing mechanism creaking is one of the most suspenseful and exciting moments one can have, however macabre it may seem, though. Sometimes, I myself am afraid I am only joining the Marines because I want to go for the ultimate rush in that respect. I just don't talk about it for fear of criticism.

I'd like to close by saying that neither my family nor I believe in killing just for the hell of it. We use almost everything on the animal, including meat, skin/fur, and bones. We will only keep the antlers as a trophy (if it's a deer). In addition, I'm only 17, so I don't really have much experience in the human mind; I simply think about psychology and philosophy a lot in my free time.

Last thing: I do believe that extinction due to human causes is a very bad thing, but I feel that the "cute" factor plays too much of a role. Let's face it, pandas have very little effect on nature. People only care because they are cute. I hate pandas.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 12:18 am



mantasj

Less silly birds, More white anglo saxon protestants

```
for(int x =0; x bird )
{
  MessageBox.Show("I RULE!");
}
```

```
else
{
WASPs++;
}

}
```

Posted 30 June 2006 at 02:49 am



mantasj

oops something went haywire w/ that code :D

Posted 30 June 2006 at 02:51 am



HGirl

This is bad but doesn't this tipe of thing sounds familiar?...

Posted 30 June 2006 at 06:06 am



just_dave

Anthony Kendall said: "It's not Evolution that killed the Passenger Pigeon, it's man."

but surely it was evolution that brought man to the point of being able to wipe out the Passenger Pigeon; no? (That's *if* evolution is factual, which I seriously doubt.)

I'm not sure where jpv6 picked up the line of drivel spewed earlier, but that's even more questionable than evolution. Native populations kept the whole of North America cleared & kept bison and pigeon populations in check? And white explorers & settlers killed the natives off, resulting in forests and animal populations to explode? Please. I have to call BS on that. Notice he says that man is a "keystone species" and "our actions have tremendous reverberations throughtout the entire ecological chain." But nothing about how the native "man" played a part in the ecological chain; sounds more like white-Anglo-Saxon-western-Judeao/Christian bashing to me.

I have to chime in with Sen. McCarthy; I occasionally hunt and fish, and while I don't necessarily enjoy the killing part, I do enjoy the getting outdoors and tromping about in the woods & fields, and I enjoy the eating of what I've bagged. I wonder how many people in this thread who are complaining about hunters had meat for a meal recently, or slipped on a pair of shoes or a belt made of leather, or ran over a rabbit or squirrel with a car. It's awfully hypocritical to point fingers and cry "boo" at the

hunter because the hunter kills when your everyday actions also require animals to die. Just because you don't actively kill the animal doesn't mean you're not participating in its death.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 07:08 am



Anthony Kendall

just_dave,

Regardless of whether or not Evolution brought about the capabilities of mankind in regards to extinction, it is human action that did the slaughter. Our "free will" made the choices that lead to the demise of a species. Evolution did not do that. Claiming otherwise is akin to claiming that guns kill people. I think you would agree that the human agent, the person pulling the trigger, kills people.

Those who would wish to say that humans are just part of Darwinism and thus can do whatever they want to other species also tend to be the ones that deny Evolution exists. Interesting double-think there. Here you are really just trying to cover up moral and ethical shortcomings with some intellectually lazy arguments.

You also question a line of scientific evidence and theorizing of which you have not read or heard. You are "calling BS" on something based on your intuition alone, which is just as likely to be fallible as anyone else's. How about before you "call BS" you learn what it is you are talking about and listen to those people whom have dedicated their lives to studying something you claim expertise on with hardly a thought.

It's not "white-Anglo-Saxon-western-Judeo-Christian bashing" at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Actually your argument isn't even a logical one. It sounds like you are a "white-Anglo-Saxon-western-Judeo-Christian" trying to preserve his God-given special place in the world.

jp6 was saying that native species reshaped the landscape every bit as powerfully as Westerners would have, and that as a result the environment when Western settlers found it was not in its natural state. Again, here the book *1491* has a lot to say about views of native peoples.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 07:44 am



Duffalo

“Evolution” is a word that is used to describe a process observed in the physical world, like “global warming,” not an ideal that we should aspire to or an active force of nature.



In a nutshell: spontaneous genetic variation gives rise to traits that are either passed on to offspring or not, depending on the organism’s degree of reproductive success. Whether the organism dies in a plague or an armed massacre is completely irrelevant!

Is it immoral to wipe out a species? That depends on your definition of morality. It sounds maybe like you consider those actions that help to maintain the current biological status quo to be “moral” and those that upset it to be “immoral.” Not everyone agrees on this point.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 12:11 pm

Anthony Kendall

Is it immoral to wipe out a species? That depends on your definition of morality. It sounds maybe like you consider those actions that help to maintain the current biological status quo to be “moral” and those that upset it to be “immoral.” Not everyone agrees on this point.”

Upsetting a biological status quo can be done in a variety of ways. Some of them are entirely okay, like the need to grow crops to feed ourselves. Others are not, such as clubbing of baby seals to harvest their skins and wear them for a few years as decoration. Another example would be the capture of Passenger Pigeons to use as carnival booth shooting targets. Often, the pigeons were so docile that they would merely stand on a platform while carnival-goers won prizes by killing them. You can say that the pigeons are stupid, sure, but that doesn’t make the killing a moral act. That’s what I was talking about, not some general “upsetting of the status quo”.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 01:22 pm



frenchsnake

Great article! I’ve been reading the stories here for a while, but this is my first post.

It’s hard to image such a flock of pigeons. We always read about what the world was like hundreds of years ago when everything was enormous: the herds, the forests... Makes me want to move back into the mountains. Only a year in D.C. and you start forgetting what it’s like to see nothing but mountains on the horizon...

But I guess that's neither here nor there. As far as what the settlers did to the pigeons, it seems like it was the logical choice at the time for them. "Everything in moderation," right? The pigeons were doing a lot of damage because there were too many of them. If humans had to face that sort of situation again today, I suspect that people would argue for hunting only until the population is down to a manageable size. It's like thinning a forest to prevent forest fires.

Also, I agree that there is too much use of the word "cute" in conservation arguments. It affects our nurturing sense instead of asking us to rationally decide what creatures live and which ones will die. And yes, humans must make that decision. We are beyond evolution, at least in most industrialized countries, because we don't spend most of our time trying to find enough food and shelter to survive. I think that humans have a duty to try and save species that are endangered because we have the capability to do so.

And as for the question of why people hunt, it is my opinion that an instinct to kill is normal for a living creature. Maybe some people will always be stuck with the desire to kill, and the only way to fulfill that desire is by hunting wild animals or by joining the army... And sorry for my cowardly use of such cop-out words as "maybe" and "in my opinion".

Posted 30 June 2006 at 02:33 pm



markus

The pigeons didn't go extinct cause we killed them, they went extinct because no new ones were born. You can't say it was cruel they went extinct, less pigeons died BECAUSE they went extinct.

And anyway, who's life has really been hurt by not having passenger pigeons. How can you call it shortsighted? Before you read this article i bet 95% of you didnt even know they ever existed, and now that you do you're life won't change one bit.

If you're a darwinist then we're just another animal and we kicked their a** in survival of the fittest.

If you believe in God then who cares? Animals don't have souls; we do. God is prolly happier that the poor settlers had a good meal than some disease ridden bird died.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 04:41 pm



whaaat

1c3d0g said: "Huh? What crawled up your ass, boy? Look, when people purposely club animals to death for no valid reason or sew their eyes shut so they can kill even more animals, they have a serious mental problem. I will kill anyone who does that to one of my animals. Not that that's likely going to happen, 'cause I have quite a few precautions in place to avoid it. But if it does happen, I will not hesitate to gun down those scumbags."



Does anyone else find this a little upsetting? Some one who is so against the killing of an animal would have no problem killing a person because of the animal? In essence you are worse than the hunter from the beginning!

Posted 30 June 2006 at 04:52 pm

primeline31

I beg to differ! I've recently read the book "1491 : New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus" by Charles Mann and he has a large section devoted to the passenger pidgeon that puts an entirely different spin on this.

In his book, he states that archeologists have NEVER found any passenger pidgeons bones in any of the native American refuse pits anywhere in the passenger pidgeon's range.

He questions, if passenger pidgeons were always so plentiful and found to be quite tasty by the white people, then WHY were there no bones in the refuse pits? He presents this seemingly puzzling bit of information as part of a larger story: the fact that in truth, America was once densely populated by native Americans. He believes and provides convincing support for the idea that the great majority of native Americans were wiped out by diseases brought to this continent by early non-American seafarers many, many years before the Pilgrims landed (just who does he think did this? Read the book!)

Native American cultural kind and sympathetic approaches towards caring for their sick, promoted the spread of the deadly diseases at astonishing rates. This led to the demise of native American hunting and farming practices which changed the botanical landscape allowing the passenger pidgeon population to take off. He also presents a similar case for the American bison (buffalo). If you remember, the land was once blanketed with buffalo as far as the eye could see.

There are many more fascinating parts to this book (for example, Squanto – the Indian who helped the Pilgrims – had actually spent years in Europe before returning to America. He returned to what was his former village only to find that his whole village gone, all dead to disease and there where white strangers living in strange dwellings on the site of his former home. The newcomers called it Plymouth,

Massachusetts. He did not help the Pilgrims out of the goodness of his heart, but because a chief of another rival tribe struck a deal with him and persuaded him to do so. This, too, is covered in the book.)

Get thee to the library and read this book!

Posted 30 June 2006 at 05:04 pm



Anthony Kendall

“And anyway, who’s life has really been hurt by not having passenger pigeons. How can you call it shortsighted? Before you read this article i bet 95% of you didnt even know they ever existed, and now that you do you’re life won’t change one bit.
“

Who’s life here in America was been hurt by the starving deaths of millions of Chinese during Mao’s Great Leap Forward. I bet 95% of us didn’t even know about the existence of the millions who died in Stalin’s camps either. Also, your life probably didn’t change one bit when a million Rwandans were cut down as they fled their own neighbor’s machetes.

Yes, people and pigeons are very different morally. But, you can’t make the argument that because something is unimportant to you it doesn’t matter if it’s killed. By that reasoning, the only thing that does matter is your own friends, family, and pets.
Mmmm...that’s some good moral relativism!

Posted 30 June 2006 at 05:28 pm



Reilly

markus said: “The pigeons didn’t go extinct cause we killed them, they went extinct because no new ones were born. You can’t say it was cruel they went extinct, less pigeons died BECAUSE they went extinct.

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If you believe in God then who cares? Animals don’t have souls; we do. God is prolly happier that the poor settlers had a good meal then some disease ridden bird died.”

This is a silly argument and could just as easily be used this to justify the holocaust. I believe that God (if he exists) has compassion for all living things. To say that the rest of the planet is here merely to serve whatever urge happens to take our fancy is a sad indictment of your point of view.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 05:59 pm



Arcangel

frenchsnake posts – The pigeons were doing a lot of damage because there were too many of them. If humans had to face that sort of situation again today, I suspect that people would argue for hunting only until the population is down to a manageable size. It's like thinning a forest to prevent forest fires.

This same situation has come about with the Canadian Geese. These geese are in many parks that have rivers, lakes, streams or big ponds. Their excrement all over is testament to the problem. There are people that want these great birds killed as if they were vermin but many more are opposed to it. Thank goodness smarter heads prevail.

Posted 30 June 2006 at 09:01 pm



cutterjohn

Arcangel said: "This same situation has come about with the Canadian Geese. These geese are in many parks that have rivers, lakes, streams or big ponds. Their excrement all over is testament to the problem. There are people that want these great birds killed as if they were vermin but many more are opposed to it. Thank goodness smarter heads prevail."

Ever noticed the amount of people that don't want an animal killed is directly proportional to how cute and cuddly it is..

There is zero difference between killing a kitten and squishing a maggot. both are baby animals. One is cute though, while the other is disgusting, so people only care about the one.

Posted 01 July 2006 at 12:54 am



Kryndis

Sen.McCarthy said: "Being a Southerner and occasional hunter (haven't done it in years, though), I would first like to say thanks for being respectful. It seems to me that

for many of us, hunting is our way of saying that we are still as rugged as our forefathers, or something related to that.

Another reason is that we want something different. By that, I mean how we go to the store once or twice a week and pick up some meat and vegetables and such, then bring it back and store it in the refrigerator until we are hungry, or going to a restaurant where the food simply appears. Sometimes, enjoyment comes from making your food from the ground up.

But really, I think it appeals to man's primal instincts. Having a deer in the sights of a rifle with the finger slowly placing pressure the trigger and hearing the firing mechanism creaking is one of the most suspenseful and exciting moments one can have, however macabre it may seem, though. Sometimes, I myself am afraid I am only joining the Marines because I want to go for the ultimate rush in that respect. I just don't talk about it for fear of criticism.

I'd like to close by saying that neither my family nor I believe in killing just for the hell of it. We use almost everything on the animal, including meat, skin/fur, and bones. We will only keep the antlers as a trophy (if it's a deer). In addition, I'm only 17, so I don't really have much experience in the human mind; I simply think about psychology and philosophy a lot in my free time.

Last thing: I do believe that extinction due to human causes is a very bad thing, but I feel that the "cute" factor plays too much of a role. Let's face it, pandas have very little effect on nature. People only care because they are cute. I hate pandas."

I just wanted to thank you for your insightful comment. While I'm not sure I'm any closer to understanding the emotions you describe as far as hunting an animal, I do understand the thrill in general of firing a gun. I've only fired a rifle on a handful of occasions but I definitely understand where the enthusiasm for it comes from.

As for hunting, this may simply be one of those things I'll never fully understand and I'm OK with that. Different strokes for different folks and all that jazz. I will say, and I should have said before, that as far as hunting and using the entire animal, I completely understand that and respect it. It's the trophy hunters that simply stick the head on the wall and do nothing else with the animal that make no sense to me.

As far as your age, I'm 23 so it's not as though I have a great many years of experience on you or anything. From the sound of it I imagine we both tend to have the same things on our minds much of the time.

And I do agree with you about the cute factor. That said, I think it has more to do with economics than anything else. If some "Save the Animals" group comes along and decides to raise funds, they're going to make more money sending out postcards with

pandas on them than with pictures of some rare cockroach. It's simple human nature. It doesn't really bother me as long as they use the resulting funds to help as many animals as possible, not just the cute ones.

Once again, I really appreciated your reply and good luck to you in the Marines!

Posted 01 July 2006 at 06:34 am



1c3d0g

whaaat said: "Does anyone else find this a little upsetting? Some one who is so against the killing of an animal would have no problem killing a person because of the animal? In essence you are worse than the hunter from the beginning!"

OK, let's look at it this way: a few years from now aliens with advanced spaceships land on planet Earth. They're superior beings than all of us and see Humanity as nothing more than a cancer on this planet. They decide to kill us off...would you like to see that happen? I didn't think so.

So just because "we" (as in Human beings) are superior – or if you want to think about it in a different way, smarter – than these poor animals does *NOT* give you the God forsaken right to purposely kill them, just because "they're in your way" or some crap like that! That is the message I'm trying to convey, but it seems the essence gets lost in translation.

Posted 01 July 2006 at 06:03 pm



mxvirgil

Squab Veronique, sautéed baby zucchini w/sun dried tomatoes, fresh basil chiffonade & balsamic vinegar, crusty bread, dry, white wine, a stimulating dinner companion... Man, I'm sorry they're all gone....

Posted 01 July 2006 at 11:18 pm



whaaat

1c3d0g said: "OK, let's look at it this way: a few years from now aliens with advanced spaceships land on planet Earth. They're superior beings than all of us and see Humanity as nothing more than a cancer on this planet. They decide to kill us off... would you like to see that happen? I didn't think so.

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*about it in a different way, smarter – than these poor animals does *NOT* give you the God forsaken right to purposely kill them, just because “they’re in your way” or some crap like that! That is the message I’m trying to convey, but it seems the essence gets lost in translation.”*

I never said anyone had a right to kill animals all i pointed out was that you were willing to kill a person because they did something you perceived as wrong. Thats a little something called “murder” and you go to a place called “jail”. But I guess drastic measures need to be taken to avenge the animals death. Even if it means 25 to life. Two killings don’t make a right!

Posted 02 July 2006 at 09:56 am



1c3d0g

Sometimes, people have to make sacrifices in order to better a cause. That includes, unfortunately, the killing of other people. For instance, many people had to be killed before World War 2 officially came to a close. If the landing on Normandy etc. never happened, Little Boy and Fat Man were never dropped, what was left of us would all be speaking German (in the Western World at least), slaving for Hitler (and his successor)...

Like I said, I don’t see any valid reason why anybody would do such a despicable act. If someone jumps over my wall and walks onto my property, thinking they have the right to club my dogs to death, you bet I’ll shoot their ass right there, no questions asked! An attack on my animals is the same as an attack on me, and that’s called self-defense. It’s better to be judged by twelve than carried by six.

Posted 03 July 2006 at 04:37 am



sulkykid

mxvirgil said: “Squab Veronique, sautéed baby zucchini w/sun dried tomatoes, fresh basil chiffonade & balsamic vinegar, crusty bread, dry, white wine, a stimulating dinner companion... Man, I’m sorry they’re all gone...”

Well, there are still plenty of plain ol’ pigeons around. They’re fatter, too. My uncles used to hunt them, down by the grain elevators. (With permission, of course.)

Posted 03 July 2006 at 08:05 am

whaaat



I would hope you'd be thrown in jail in a second. There is absolutely no way to compare WWII and the dogs in your backyard.

Posted 03 July 2006 at 09:31 am



devnull

I happen to live in an area (Hanover, PA) that was renown for it's Passenger Pigeon numbers, they even named the hills surrounding the area after them. There are stories about the "Pigeon Hills", millions of birds, making the sky dark when they'd migrate. I hear there is a pigeon statue up there some where commemorating the birds.

It's a shame that they are all gone, but it does make sense that something in nature was out of whack for the population to get so huge. I'm just now seeing the fox population in the area starting to come back, but is that due to no DDT spraying or nature balancing itself out?

Damn Interesting, this site certainly matches it's name. One of the best out there.

Sean D.

Posted 04 July 2006 at 10:14 am



Melon Head

Manage the Earth; don't destroy it.

Posted 04 July 2006 at 07:29 pm



rp2

blame canada

Posted 06 July 2006 at 05:38 pm



felixmonk

blame who you want. it's all my fault.

Posted 11 July 2006 at 06:10 pm



smokefoot

The native americans were mostly farmers, not hunter-gatherers. Hollywood westerns give a different impression, but in reality they were raising corn, squash and beans across North America.



Drakvil

Posted 19 July 2006 at 10:14 am

devnull said: " I hear there is a pigeon statue up there some where commemorating the birds."

Do people perch on it and leave droppings all over it?
Pigeons do it on statues of people...

Posted 23 July 2006 at 12:34 am



CHRISLAV

I think hunters are taking a bit of an unfair hit here..I consider myself an ethical hunter, i see nothing wrong with taking a game animal which will be used/consumed and controls the population, plus hunters contribute millions every year to public lands and wildlife..IN NO WAY do I consider these people that kill multitudes of any animals for any of the reasons given in the article "hunters"..this is opportunistic killing at its worst...obviously there was not a strong sense of conservation involved with the extinction of these birds..yeah, there would be alot of morons running out there front doors with shotguns today if the government told them that a certain species needing "eradicating" ..for those who killed the birds for their families to eat, so what? as long as they didn't kill 5,000 to eat 20 or 30 birds, but lets face it, it was a fully accepted mass killing that took place by everyone and anyone with a gun,club,fire,flyswatter,etc..I do not agree that it was part of a "natural selection" that they are gone, they may have been "pests" to humans in some way but don't forget that they played a role in the food chain as well, all those predators that preyed on the "squabs" certainly had to have been affected, right??

Posted 19 September 2006 at 09:36 pm



Gortlesnort

I think there are still some Passenger Pigeons out there. I think we underestimated the adaptability of the species and some migrated to remote locations, and I don't think anyone's been looking really hard for the last 70 years or so.

Posted 12 June 2007 at 09:56 am

Radiatidon



Prince said: "why are they called passenger pigeons?"

I wondered this myself. So I looked up the scientific name for this creature. It is *Ectopistes Migratorius*. The breakdown of the Latin is as follows – Ecto means "outside" while piste is Italian for "trail". Thus you could say that *Ectopistes* roughly translates to wanderer. Now the second word *Migratorius* is Latin that translates as "to move or change location periodically."

So why is it called/described by this name as the migratory wanderer. As noted in the article the population of a single flock could deplete the resources of anyone area in a short time, so a new nesting ground would have to be found. This is a classic example of a species out-of-control. As noted by another poster the scientific community believes, based on evidence (or lack thereof, of pigeon remains in pre-European Native American communities. With such an easy and plentiful food source, there should have been heaps of pigeon bones in community offal or fire pits, which there is not. There are signs of other birds and small animals though) that this animal flourished due to the demise of its main predator.

Anyway the flock would have no main nesting ground as other migratory birds do. Thus would wander from site-to-site, which is unusual for an avian. This still did not clear up the name for me. So I explored the various European groups and discovered that the French called them "Pigeón de passage" that translates into Pigeon of passage, which they referred to them due to the astounding number of birds in the sky at anytime. English speakers later mispronounced the name as the Passenger Pigeon.

Posted 19 July 2007 at 02:18 pm



spencer

You know who all the animal rights people should really be worried about. Lions!!!! Have you ever seen a Lion kill a gazelle. That is the most inhuman thing I have ever seen. Once they dig their teeth into its neck they just kinda hang out with it until it dies a slow horrific death, or they start eating it before it's dead. The point I'm trying to make here is that it's OK for humans to kill animals, or for other animals to kill animals!!! It's how things work!!! If you are a vegetarian because you think killing and eating animals is bad (I know vegetarians that just dont like the taste of meat) than you are living in a dream world.

The way I see things is that believing in God or not is what really distinguishes people. For example, If you do not believe in God than we are just really smart Apes!! So what right do we have to take land away from other animals or kill them or make them our slaves? If you do believe in God than you believe all animals were created for us and we have rights that they don't have like the right to not be killed.

Posted 20 July 2007 at 08:08 am



dogu4

Fascinating story, and one that I've long wondered about. Recently I came across speculation that prior to the eradication of about 90% of Native Americans following their exposure to European diseases, these tribal people who long cultivated or "husbanded" the "wild-lands" also limited the pigeons' ability to overrun their habitat.

There are many tales in the de-wilding of the New World that are largely un-reported since basic biology, let alone ecology as we know it, were yet to be practiced scientifically. A tremendous example has been documented in Farley Mowat's "Sea of Slaughter" in which he recounts the extermination of the Esquimo Curlew, just one of many less well known than the famous Passenger Pigeon, which at one time likewise numbered in the billions following a migration path that reached from Alaska to Newfoundland to the Caribbean.

Posted 21 July 2007 at 11:47 am



Bill N

It's incorrect to say the passenger pigeon didn't breed in captivity; it was bred by Professor Whitman of Chicago in 1904 on a number of occasions as it was elsewhere but in-breeding was endemic as each pigeon fancier did not seek fresh blood, and there was no national register or recovery plan involving captive breeding. Professor Whitman's passenger pigeon collection declined to one, Martha, the last passenger pigeon, and he donated her to Cincinnati Zoo where they had a male but he was too old to breed.

due to

Posted 26 March 2008 at 03:01 am



fluke

From all sides of the argument the extinction of a species is a bad thing. For a species to be successful it needs to live in harmony with its environment or the self-destruction of its environment will lead to its demise (this could be mankind's downfall).

If you love to kill animals, leave some for others to kill, have respect for your fellow and future hunters or you're not a true hunter.

If you like animals, protect them for future generations to like.

Who knows? the cure for terminal illnesses may be buried with the last of a dead species.

The people who shot the last lot of birds new they were going to be extinct but did so anyway.

We havent changed a bit and we havent learned a thing, only very very recently we killed an etire species of black rhino.

Trying to convince some people that a species has the right to exist is like trying to convince Hitler that Jews have a right to exist, and had he succeeded there probably would have been people posting messages stating how they find it hard to have sympathy for the extinct people.

Its better to hunt and eat a wild animal that has had a life of freedom than pay people to raise battery farmed animals fed on hormones and steroids, but do so humanely in respectful moderation.

If anything I have said has been hypocritical I don't care, if I were scared of being a hypocrit I would be scared to change my mind and would thus be narrow minded.

This discussion reminds me of the film "hard target", where men were hunted for sport and scenes in the film featured john woo's trademark pigeons.

Posted 27 August 2008 at 12:39 am



Michael Cochrane

I have read everythng in print about this bird – have been fasinated since a small child. My dad remembers when the ducks used to blot out the sun and destroy the cornfeilds (grasshoppers too) along the Platte River flyway (circa 1915). The locals killed enough to eat but the Isaac Waltoners shot thme all day long and allowed them to float down the river. A roving correspondent for the London Penny Magazine 1821 (in my possession) describes the breeding habits of the wild pigeons along the Ohio river bottoms. I still hope Science can reconstruct the DNA and produce a passenger pigeon in the near future. There are enuf museum specimens to yield useful samples.

Cochrane04

Posted 23 March 2010 at 01:10 pm



dach

I still hope Science can reconstruct the DNA and produce a passenger pigeon in the near future. There are enuf museum specimens to yield useful samples.

Unfortunately, based on recent discovery of epigenetics I don't think we will be bringing any extinct species back anytime soon, if ever. According to epigenetics there is a whole other chemical instruction set that operates the dna, that determines how living multicellular organism develop, and these chemical instructions are provided by the mother, the environment and other factors, not captured in dna.

As to posters quoting 1491 as arguing there were far few passenger pigeons;; I am unconvinced Mann's speculation that North America, where PP ranged, was home to a massive native human population, and thus controlled animal population. Mass human settlements rivaling Europe, Asia, Africa, Central America going back centuries would surely have left far more evidence, even if as oral history among remaining North American tribes, especially in relatively untouched Canada and Alaska. I think lack of human-pigeon interaction was because moderate number of native americans didn't need to target, or even avoided, massive flocks of always migrating passenger pigeons to live on, as there was enough uncultivated land shared by human and creature alike (think of african savanna).

Posted 25 March 2010 at 01:46 pm



artstone

The author's claim was "birds that flew so close that 50 could be brought down with a single blast". The evidence to back up that claim was for shooting 40+ per shot with birds standing in a group on the ground. Those are very different claims. "Could be" reeks of exaggeration typical of sporting enthusiasts. "I could have caught 1,000 trout in a day if I hadn't quit after an 15 minutes", etc...

Posted 07 September 2010 at 01:56 am



Brdbrain

Probably too late to comment. I read all comments with interest.

It is possible to kill many birds with one shot. Especially the passenger pigeon which traveled in compact masses. Shooting into the flock killed a few birds, but the resulting effect was like someone shooting into a group of racing motorcycles (no, I don't hate motorcycles). When one goes down, it takes many more in the pack with it. Traveling at speeds of over 60 mph, many birds in the vicinity of those shot would be injured by displacement. And the guns they used were more like cannon filled with grapeshot.

I don't consider those who made their living killing pigeons to be 'hunters'. Their

intent was wanton slaughter of entire flocks. There was no intent in 'fair chase'. As the forests they were dependent upon for nesting and food were destroyed, they became a 'pest species' to those trying to eke a living from a hard land. As stated by others, there were no grocery stores as we have today. What they wore, what they ate came from the land. If you had planted a crop to feed your family and saw 3 million hungry birds coming toward your fields, it wasn't simply a matter of inconvenience. It was the difference between feeding your family for the coming winter or starvation.

That being said, there were many people who spoke out against the random killing and did manage to get laws passed to prevent it. Unfortunately, none of the laws were ever enforced.

I am former rabid anti-hunter who has changed my views based upon what I have learned from nature over the years. Nature's controls of overpopulation are far more cruel than hunting by man.

We are capable of great cruelty. But we are also capable of great acts of kindness. Complaining about the loss of species without getting involved in saving at least one species makes us as culpable as those who destroy habitat and/or ignore the needs of wildlife.

Complacency of the mass population to the plight of the passenger pigeon had as much to do with their extinction as clearing the forests.

Posted 15 July 2011 at 05:32 am

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