

Flock Together: A Love Affair with Extinct Birds

By B. J. Hollars. 2017. University of Nebraska Press. 244 pages, 37.50 CAD, Cloth.

“What must it feel like to be the last person to ever see a species?” (p. 116)

Goosebumps rose across my skin as I read this line, and my imagination immediately ran away. Throughout this entire book, that thought kept crossing my mind. What would it have been like to see the last Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*), or to visit Martha, the Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), at the Cincinnati Zoo, knowing this was the last of her kind? *Flock Together* is a tragic love story between humans and extinct birds, the quest to find them again, and the hope that history will stop repeating itself.

I was surprised to learn that the author was neither an ornithologist nor a birder. Normally, I would be slightly sceptical of a book about birds not written by someone who studies them or identifies himself/herself as a birder; however, I found that this characteristic added to the charm of the book. While the book doesn't seem to have a particular audience in mind, it would likely engage those who may be intimidated reading a non-fiction book about birds because little jargon was used throughout. Whether you have an interest in conservation, are a beginning birder, or are a seasoned ornithologist, you will be able to identify with the author's year-long journey. The book documented the author's pursuit of knowledge and his growth as he explored and learned more about these extinct species. It reminded me of what attracted me to the environmental field in the first place, that feeling of hope, wonder, and longing to preserve our natural world.

Flock Together is divided into four sections: glimpsing, spotting, seeing, and knowing. These sections orga-

nize Hollars's journey into learning more about extinct species and the people who observed and studied them, as well as his observations on species today. Throughout, the reader is intimately acquainted with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, to which Hollars refers as his “spark bird”, the bird that began his interest in our avian friends. Though the main focus was on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, we are also briefly introduced to the Passenger Pigeon, the Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), and the Dusky Seaside Sparrow (*Ammodramus maritimus nigrescens*).

While the title suggests a “love affair with extinct birds”, we also see Hollars's “love affair” and admiration for those who sought to save the species. We become acquainted with several people including: naturalist Francis Zirrer, conservationist and Passenger Pigeon expert Bill Shorger, painter Don Eckelberry, modern birder Steve Betchkal, and museum curators such as Paula Holahan.

While I was surprised that this book tends to focus more on the people striving to save species from extinction than the species themselves, it was a wonderful read. Hollars did a thorough job researching and trying to understand the lives and perspectives of these individuals in his writing, he projects a modesty that many of us can relate to at a time when we were (or are) fledglings in a field of study. His writing style is also one that is very easy to connect with, free of jargon yet effectively communicating the history of endangered species and the urgency facing many species still alive today. Hollars manages to sound the alarm on human-induced extinction without being overly preachy.

Toward the end of the book, Hollars paves the way for future thought and discussion regarding our role in extinction. While the book did focus on extinct birds, it brings into question the status of all species still present today and how human desires often shape their futures. However, Hollars noted it best when he said, "What we often fail to realize... is how their futures shape our own" (p. 176). This circular narrative is what I enjoyed most about this book. Many of the insights,

from both Hollars and others in his book, make us value not only what we could travel to see, but also what is in our own neighbourhood. It reminds us that while we need to strive and protect species that are at risk, we must also place value on keeping common species common.

TIANNA BURKE
Nobel, ON, Canada