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Although the last known Carolina parakeet died in 1918, this species is alive and well in the imagination of today's Instagram community. Clockwise from upper left: @jpopstudios; @emilydahl_illustration; @jadafitchillustration; @rockcrestglass; @saragolish; @ikerpaz; @maude_alta; @2littlewings; @cy.gavin. Used with permission.

J. DREW LANHAM

Forever Gone

*How bird lives and black lives intertwine
under the long shadow of history*

I MAGINE there is no headstone at the Cincinnati Zoo aviary, no mark of remembrance, no epitaph. Had there been, it might have read:

— INCAS —
HERE LIES THE LAST CAROLINA PARAKEET
CONUROPSIS CAROLINENSIS
DIED FEBRUARY 21, 1918
HIS LIFE DONE AND BARELY KNOWN,
DOOMED TO THE DARK SWAMP HEREAFTER,
A BIRD FOREVER GONE

Final rites for the passage of one of the most unique birds ever to sweep across the skies of the American psyche.

There are few creatures that we can tag with exact departure dates, but with the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) we probably can. It all ended on February 21, 1918, in the same year World War I came to a close and not quite four years after the passenger pigeon's own exit from existence. Incas died that day. He had been housed for some years at the Cincinnati Zoo aviary, and was the last Carolina parakeet anyone would ever see with certainty.

The passenger pigeon's extinction was sadly predictable. People had blasted at flocks that once darkened the sky until the birds became scarcer and scarcer, and then were finally gone. But how the Carolina parakeets' population dwindled down to Incas is a mystery that plagues conservation scientists to this day. It wasn't for lack of the species' range. Despite their name, Carolina parakeets were found across most of the eastern half of the lower forty-eight states. Recent science shows that there

were two subspecies—a southeastern population, *Conuropsis carolinensis carolinensis*, that dwelled in the Southeast Atlantic, Gulf coastal plains, and all of Florida; and another, *Conuropsis carolinensis ludovicianus*, found west to Texas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. In some years, birds from the western groups wandered widely and could end up in the Northeast. Wherever they occurred—north, south, east, or midwest—mature floodplain bottomland forests lying along great rivers were the parakeets' preferred haunts.

Conuropsis carolinensis seemed misplaced in the temperate latitudes. The gaudy tropical combination of its emerald green body, sunset saffron in the wings, and tangerine on the head and cheeks didn't belong here. The Seminole people tagged the bird colorfully: *puzzi la née*, yellow-headed one. A saber-like tail that would fan to break or bank in a turn, paired with wedge-shaped swept wings, made a pleasing form. Attach a beak hooked and notched like its falcon cousins—but designed in the parrot kind to pry and peel fruits, nuts, and seeds instead of to tear flesh. Its diet varied widely, sycamore and cypress balls among the favorites on the menu, but its affection for one particular seed—cockleburs—was especially noteworthy. An otherwise innocuous weedy plant that grows almost anywhere soil is disturbed, the cocklebur produces thumbnail-sized ovate seeds that look like miniature spike-covered footballs. Walk through a tangle of them and you'll soon have the company of hundreds of the needy seeds entangled on your clothes. When it's time to disentangle yourself (and your canine companion) from the unwanted riders, you will need time and patience—the plant's tenacious desire to attach and disperse was an inspiration for hook and loop fasteners like Velcro. Beyond being a sticky annoyance and crop

pest, cocklebur is highly toxic. Pain and death are the final irritations for many animals that dare to ingest it. Somehow though, Carolina parakeets were immune to the toxic effects and relished the seeds like candy, possibly concentrating the chemicals in their own bodies. Some early naturalists reported cats dying after eating Carolina parakeet entrails.

Parrots—a family that includes parakeets, macaws, and cockatoos—are among the prodigies of birds. They have a sense of themselves, of others, and the environment around them that likely extends beyond instinct. Being a parrot means being a thinker who relishes the company of friends and kin—sociality is as much a part of who you are as your plumage. Parrots care. As with us, the long-term parental nurturing and constant preening and feeding exchanges foster a sense of community. That's who parrots are, and who *Conuropsis carolinensis* was—an evolutionarily complex, stunningly beautiful creation whose time was cut short, in part, by individuals not so deeply feeling or thinking.

Humans have always looked skyward for inspiration, imagining themselves unbound by gravity or the weight of oppression. Flight means freedom.

CHOOSE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION as a profession and you're surrounded by loss—marooned on an island of dwindling hopes surrounded by past practices, current lack of care, and emerging policies that can drive the conservationist into psychosis. It can be an unhealthy undertaking that drains one's reserves of hope.

My office walls are covered with portraits of birds gone past existence. At a glance I can see ivory-billed woodpeckers, Bachman's warblers, passenger pigeons, heath hens, great auks, and Labrador ducks. It's an ornithological pantheon of loss. Some Gone Birds, as I call them, especially the ones that would've inhabited my southern home place, have cast spells that I can't shake. As a result, I've carved, collected, and commissioned facsimiles of these birds. I have wooden ivory-bills in abundance and at least a half-dozen passenger pigeons scattered around. There are even a few Bachman's warblers skulking about. It's a fantastical aviary that serves to sate a desire to un-doom the wondrous loveliness.

Mourning Gone Birds isn't just a dive into a worry hole, it's a dirty crawl into a deep and sandy pit. For each species that is somehow recovered from oblivion—a bald eagle, for instance—more seem to tumble back in. Whooping cranes, Kirtland's warblers, Gunnison sage-grouse, California condors, and many more teeter on the crater's edge of Almost Gone. Beyond the birds, I mourn the loss of places too, because landscapes degrade and fall into the pit along with the birds. Longleaf pine forests, tallgrass prairies, and salt marshes shrink daily to mere fragments of once expansive swaths. I mourn the Gone Birds and the landscapes they inhabited because the whole of all of us becomes compromised in the loss of some of us.

There are fewer Carolina parakeets in my aviary than any other Gone Bird, though. I have a print or two—and even one life-sized figure fashioned from an artfully contrived kaleidoscopic conglomeration of pipe-cleaners, a commissioned request from a young friend. That I have fewer parakeets than the other Gone Birds is odd, because for all the birds I've seen alive or dead, mourned and marveled over, all fall behind *Conuropsis carolinensis* in reverence. Thoughts of the extinct bird hang as a gnawing remembering I can't shed, a haint of times past. The idea of a parakeet's flourishes decorating a bald cypress like some sort of feathered ornament grabs me by the heart in a way the others don't. There are no known recordings of the bird's voice and only a few black and white photographs of birds kept as pets. Ghosted from existence, it sits now only in memory and museum trays.

Sometimes I seek the validation of what was in natural history museums. Behind what's stuffed and posed for the public facade of museum displays and dioramas, there are the museums' back rooms and basement catacombs where rows and stacks of dead things lie side by side. Here, the empty-eye socketed souls of creatures killed and collected for science are kept cool and clean to reduce the chances for decay or insect infestation, and are essential tools for the scientist and for conservation.

A few years back, I visited the Georgia Museum of Natural History when there were several Gone Birds on display. It just so happened that at the same time, painter Philip Juras had a number of his relict southern landscapes—portraits of southern river valleys before they were dammed to slowing and scenes of old-growth cypress swamps—hanging around the displays of dead birds. I was drawn into a wormhole that featured the extinct birds, which seemed ready to fly back into the landscapes where they had once lived. There was a feather-worn ivory-billed woodpecker frozen forever in pursuit of a nonexistent grub, and a passenger pigeon perched in loneliness, brainlessly wondering how billions became none. And then there was the Carolina parakeet, which pulled at me with a mesmerizing gravitas. Yes,

it was just as dead as the others. There hadn't even been an attempt to pose it on a branch like its peers—it was just a study skin, a tube of feathers meant to be measured and compared to other parakeets.

There was something different about this skin though—it demanded something more than pity for its plight gone past. And then it struck me. I was being watched. Unlike any study skin I'd ever seen of any bird, the cotton stuffed sack of feathers was watching me. Most stuffed birds have little tufts of cotton protruding from the holes where their eyes used to be, giving them a zombielike appearance. But this particular Carolina parakeet had glossy orbits of yellow glass eyes instead. It lay there unblinking with unsettling eyes; eyes that gazed through the display case and through me. Spend time in the company of parrots, and you'll realize quickly (and sometimes uncomfortably) that the birds are thinking on levels beyond asking for crackers. They'll look you over and size you up. Some behaviorists maintain that intelligence in the parrot family can approach that of preschool children—maybe beyond. And although this bird was long past thinking, it appeared thoughtful nonetheless. Maybe it was begging to be released from extinction's damnation, to fly free and play again in the fragments of remaining bald cypress swamps and fallow fields rank with cocklebur.

Studying the parakeet in the museum and surrounded by landscapes that used to be, I began to imagine it among a cohort of others flashing green and gold in small, tight flocks through the used-to-be landscape. In the rendering of an old-growth, south-Georgia swamp forest, I could hear the sociable shrieks and jabbering of roosting flocks echoing from the hollow trunks of the buttressed bald cypress. I was expecting the stuffed skin to up and fly away to join a flock wheeling over old fields. Juras's swamps expanded beyond the bounds of the picture frames that held them. Colonnades of gargantuan trees guarded the riverbanks and lorded over expanses of black water wetland. The parakeets flocked in and out of wilderness that exists now only in ragged remnants of parks and preserves. On the edge of the great swamps we now know by names like Congaree, Great Dismal, Great Black, Okefenokee, Four Holes, and Kissimmee, and all along the South Carolina swamps swollen to flooding by rivers like the Savannah, Edisto, Santee, Combahee, Black, Little and Great Pee Dee, Wacamaw, and Ashepoo, the birds screeched and wheeled in a unison. Dodging centuries-old trees and diving in and out of shafts of morning sunlight, they squawked their way to where the deep forest ended and yielded to open lands and farms.

I found myself completely consumed in my imagination: suddenly, I can see the flock circling once, twice, and then on the third pass settling into an old field gone fallow. The unplanted plot is a

weedy unkempt affair choked with ragweed and cockleburs. The burry bane of many a farmer's existence, the weeds are beginning to throw their sticky seed to whatever furred thing might pass by and offer a ride to the next patch of soil. To the parakeets though, the burrs aren't pests—they're a delicacy. With great screeching in a celebration of food-finding, the parakeets land and settle in to a squabbling feast. They hang and dangle like green and gold chickadees from waist-high weeds. Tender bits from the tough burrs are consumed and the rough, sterile husks dropped to the ground. But then suddenly, the whole flock is up in the sky again in a panicked, shrieking flurry—a watchful companion's warning shrieks suggest a raptor is overhead. The swallow-tailed kite wheeling below the clouds says *danger* in the moment. And then, just as suddenly, a calm falls over them—a rapid understanding of the lack of threat from the graceful raptor whose eating interests focus on dragonflies. The flock settles again in garrulous gathering to resume the meal. They are mostly welcomed there as they digest the undesirable weed in a form of service that the farmers—and the enslaved people working in the fields—appreciate. The more burrs the parakeets destroy, the less there is to do to prep the field for growing crops again. Like my grandmother, Mamatha, used to say: many hands make light work. It is a scene likely witnessed by many across the range of the species.

John James Audubon captured the essential character of *Conuropsis carolinensis*, painting them gleefully entangled in a thicket of cocklebur. In one of his most popular works, the birds seem consumed with consuming but acutely aware, too, of the world around them. They're engaged with their food; engaged with one another; engaged with us almost two hundred years beyond the painting. Facing the portrait, you count a flock of seven. A female on the far left raises a foot. Maybe Audubon meant to show the bird in mid-scratch or stretching to reach for the next cocklebur. Since art is also about what the seer sees, I imagine her waving at whomever might be looking from beyond the frozen frame of an existence that was already waning in Audubon's time. To me, it has always seemed an invitation to come closer—one knowing being to another.

ALTHOUGH AMERICA was burgeoning at its seams when Carolina parakeets flew about in abundance, it was a nation still wildly rough around the edges. What remained in the hinterlands is what eco-restorationists sometimes refer to as *baseline*—a reference condition for return.

As an ecologist of color, the restorative thinking is a bittersweet exercise. I've been steeped in the training (or brainwashing) of the "bring-back-the-natives-undam-the-rivers-pull-up-the-privet-and-release-the-bison" paradigm. It's a wistful conjuring to make

North America great again—in an ecologically good way, I suppose. But beyond the uncomfortable verbiage about casting out exotics and eliminating aliens, there is the question of who—beyond the largely homogenous choir of restoration ecologists and wistful wishers for the good old days of yore—gets to say what wild nature is. There has been a slow admission of indigenous American contribution to the landscape, and the ways in which they managed the land that sustained their communities and culture. For ecologists, it means recognizing the role that red, brown, and black people—who preceded ecologists and their almost exclusively white conservation “movement”—played in shaping nature, and what those people knew about the North American landscape before they did.

Wishing for a contrived, humanless wildness forwards a practice of belittling—or ignoring altogether—“colored” land connection. My own dark-hued roots are mired in the soil of the American South. When I drive by, fly over, or walk through most places “down here,” I can see and often feel the actions of my ancestors who changed the land. By connecting the pain of that past to what we see now, I pay homage and deepen my personal connection with place. Yes, it’s an exorcism of past pain, but also a progression toward helping others see the land’s real history, and perhaps to become reconnected with the land. My desire to inform and inspire, beyond mere ecology, grows daily. Along with the fate of the Gone Birds and their lost worlds, it possesses me.

I wonder about the enslaved watchers who worked in the shadows of endless passenger pigeon flocks that passed overhead, or heard the ivory-bills that called from the tall timber, or glanced the Carolina parakeets that flashed across work-weary eyes. I think about salt marshes modified and maintained by enslaved Senegalese—the spring crop waving thick with Carolina gold rice and sea-island cotton that created some of the richest men in the world. Beyond the monotonous thud slice of a hoe in pluff mud, what would my ancestors have noticed? The day-to-day work of survival required more than brawn and will. From where would hope emerge? Humans have always looked skyward for inspiration, imagining themselves unbound by gravity or the weight of oppression. Flight means freedom. It is not beyond the oppressed to lean hard on natural beauty as an uplifting beam. Survival draws on inspiration. Sweet sounds and beauty are no less worthy of notice because one is in chains—perhaps they are worthier because of the chains.

For the enslaved, there was more they would have noticed about the parakeets than just their beauty. The parakeets lived in tight-knit social groups comprised of relatives. Along with crows and jays, the parakeets would have been the avian intellectuals in a landscape where they had to make do with not only what was, but with what

was to come. And then they were servants, too, clearing fields of cocklebur and sandspur menace. But when the birds exercised a desire to have more—to eat the fruit from plantation and farm orchards—the parakeets became targets of persecution. Because of their social nature, birds not killed or wounded in the first round of extermination circled around their fallen family members that screamed in fear and injury. In that empathy, more birds fell.

I imagine the flock, assaulted and driven out of a ripening orchard of plums and pears. On the edge of day, as katydid call dusk in, the birds retreat to the forests to roost in cavernous hollows. A depleted flock re-enters a shrinking swamp domain—remnants of wild southern places already disappearing along with the parakeets. They are home, finding comfort in the shadows of last light. But daily, it seems, in smaller and smaller numbers and in fewer and fewer acres.

The birds aren’t alone in the refuge. There are humans in the shadows, too. Torches lit from knots of fatwood throw long shadows onto the hollow trunks where the parakeets roost. The dark forms are Maroons, self-liberated slaves who once worked the same plantations that the parakeets frequent. They were once chattel, bound to the land at the cruel behest of white planters, but who have escaped terror and freed themselves from the very fields over which the birds have flown and fed. As the Carolina parakeets find security in wooded wetlands, so too do the Maroons—slave chasers and the “law” hesitate to pursue them into the swamps. Free from the plight of overseers and forced labor, they have lived for decades in thriving communities within mere miles of the plantations they had fled.

The Maroons shared the Carolina parakeets’ requisite for freedom. They found sustenance in the wilderness, but also made nocturnal forays back onto the plantations to secure food, tools, and sometimes weapons. They traced the same paths as the parakeets, but worked the night shift. It was a life on the edge with constant threats of persecution, capture, and death. But it was a free life and that matters most. The land was flush with grain and fruit that only existed because of black hands. What Maroons took was just reclamation for work done.

By the time the Carolina parakeet’s decline was noted by Audubon in the 1830s, the enslavement economy, fueled by whip-cracked backs, had pushed the country toward a sinful prosperity. It wasn’t just the South that benefitted. North of the Mason-Dixon line, wealth flowed upstream to financial houses and investors. The numbers of black people in bondage exploded, and as enslavement swelled, the numbers of *Conuropsis carolinensis* dwindled. And within little more than a generation of Audubon’s lamentation that “our Parakeets are very rapidly diminishing in number,” a civil war was raging across much of the birds’ range.

Persecution of any kind ultimately demands relief, whether through escape or revolt. It's all an inalienable flight to self-determination. It's a risky thing to seek one's own destiny, though. The decision to leave certain bad for uncertain good is the balance that must be measured. Enslaved people knew the gamble and some decided that liberty had to be sought at any cost, whatever consequences might come. And so when the Maroons fled to the southern swamps and found something way better than being held captive, they shared the refuge with other beings that ultimately found refuge there, too. In the convergence of demands for human dignity and freedom, and nonhuman survival and existence, there are islands of empathy that emerge between our braided-river beings.

Human trade and trafficking; genocide; driving other creatures to extinction—it is all built on a corrupt human belief that some are worthier than others. Racism and white supremacy lie at the heart of enslavement—you could be bought and sold, whipped, raped, or killed on a whim. It was custom, practice, and policy, and it is the basis of so much of the brutality and bias we experience today. It begins with the belief that some are superior and some are inferior—whether racism, or sending another species into the oblivion of extinction, they both grow from the same rotten core.

THE PARAKEETS' big-timbered bottomland world shrank even more rapidly after the Civil War and disappeared altogether into the ramped-up hyper-greed of early-twentieth-century land grabs, rampant timbering, and swamp-busting agriculture. The fast-dwindling populations of Carolina parakeets were assaulted on several sides, sending the species plummeting. Beyond habitat loss, other factors probably contributed to the decline, including competition with introduced European honeybees for tree cavities; demands for bright feathers for women's hats; and persecution as pests. Although the birds cleared fields of cockleburrs, crop depredation was likely an incentive for killing *Conuropsis carolinensis*. A flock descending on a ripening orchard or cornfield undoubtedly cost the species dearly, and the strong social ties that caused individual birds to flock around the fallen was a fatal compounding factor. As agriculture spread across the landscape, so did new diseases. Some scientists postulate that the parakeet's exposure to poultry diseases may have been a final nail in the forever-gone coffin.

And then there was the irony of rarity. As the reports of declines spread among the ornithological community, both professionals and amateurs "needed" to add birds and eggs to their collections. Collectors—many of them obsessed hoarders—shot whole flocks for the sake of "science." The museum bird that wouldn't

release me from its gaze likely fell in the name of "knowledge" and the need to possess a rare thing with no thought of its extinction.

Today, when I lead others out to birdwatch in the remaining fragments of wild places, I cannot help but bring the history of the enslaved, and the landscape we tread upon, into the same head-heart space. I cannot tell stories of birds and of the cypress swamps and old rice fields I frequent in low-country South Carolina without telling the story of those who moved forests, soil, and water through force and greed. There are stories in the soil that have to be plowed up.

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Hate, enslavement, persecution, and the dramatic changes to the land wrought by all of us are heavy burdens to bear. Maybe it's why I yet seek birds, here and gone on. The quest renders the remaining feathered things precious gifts, passed forward to survival through it all. Black ducks and black rails in "managed" rice impoundments are reminders of what was created by a cruel society on the backs of black people. We can't separate one from the other. Can efforts to steward and make conservation a more inclusive effort be bolstered now by informing others of the past connections, even when they are painful recollections? Telling the full story seems the best start. Signs and monuments must tell the whole story—including the human elements—painful as it may be, behind the present things we see. Black land ownership and connections to nature languish in many places where Carolina parakeets may have once brightened the skies. History's shadow can be a long one, especially when cast cruelly or when remedies to right wrongs are made without consideration for everyone and everything. Do we readily reveal these chapters in history? Does conservation bear a responsibility to illuminate the dark corners where not only birds and beasts have suffered, but humans have as well? If Aldo Leopold's admonition to keep every "cog and wheel" is the first step in tinkering with the ecology, then the cultural gears and switches certainly warrant our consideration.

For those birds gone on, I mourn. I mourn the Carolina parakeets persecuted as pests and shot down for simply being who they were. Their plumage and behavior became easy marks

to profile and possess for selfish purposes. I think of Incas, imprisoned as his species was on the brink of extinction, no crime committed other than being what he was. I see parallels between the Gone Birds and who I am as a Black American man. The mistreatment of nature, the disrespect for all those things believed unworthy of enough respect to not drive them into the pit of never-ness, has common plight among people who've been slighted by practice, privilege, and policy. Extinction by human hands is a sin. Racism is no different. It is a callousness built on judgmental whim. We are all part and parcel of nature, parakeets and people alike. How we treat one another determines who we all are—or might become. The good of it, our attempts to do better by birds and other species as well as each other, spells hope on one side. The upwelling of ignorance and denial of what's been, what is, and what could be, and a blind march headlong

Riddle at 29,000 Feet

You said marriage must sacrifice itself on the altar
of family, but this week I read about a man who
climbed back up Everest to find his missing wife.
I wash moonlight from your forehead and the Sphinx
in your chest asks again: *What comes down but never
goes up?* You never did learn how to waltz. The site
called Rainbow Valley earned its name from the bright
coats of all the climbers who never made it back
to base camp. The husband who went after his wife
is red is orange is blushing in the valley. Love is such
an unreliable savior. *What's so delicate that saying its name
breaks it?* The wife lived for two days in the cold. Saving her
was too risky, climbers said. Snow collected in her mouth.
The mountain whitened its history. She is blue is green
is singing when wind rides through her sockets. Who knows
if they had children. That's not the story. Ever, ever,
our happiness common, enduring. I ask what crazy thing
you'd do for me. Answer, the rain. Answer, silence.

—Traci Brimhall

into some unregulated regained greatness with the past as the meter to follow—spells certain doom. It is an evil directed at birds and humans, too. It is a callousness toward life that spells endangerment, extinction, and exclusion.

In my constant quest for birds, thinking of those gone and then reveling in the ones still with us, I also find a peace and momentary freedom from the bad that exists in the world. In my escapes to places where birdsong drowns out the news stream and a soaring swallow-tailed kite blinds me to all else except the innate desire to fly in self-determination and free will, the bad disappears for a while and I too am marooned. I become a Maroon—escaping certain bonds to find freedom in the deep recesses of wildness.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS since Incas died. In the years of wishful sightings since—a disputed sighting on the South Carolina Santee Delta, ghosts in the Georgia Okefenokee, shadows flying across the Florida Okeechobee prairie—other species have fallen silent. Most have faded with no epitaph to mark their place in the Gone Birds book. For all the reasons posited for their loss, it usually comes down to a lack of caring. And more than that—pushing a living being into the abyss of extinction is, in the end, a hate crime; a lack of compassion for another's implicit right to exist. I feel some kinship in that place, where my being is seen by some as worthless.

Those responsible for Incas's well-being had to know the species' rare status as they watched his last moments. What kind of relationship did he have with those keepers in the Cincinnati Zoo? Did Incas respond to their voices in parrot squawks and chortles, or maybe knowing parrot nods of his big-beaked head? What were those last moments like? Was there a rift in the cosmos, or a ripple somewhere "out there"? For a species whose disappearance lies in so many ill lots, many believed that those final days of the last Carolina parakeet ultimately came down to a broken heart. His mate, Lady Jane, had died a few months before, and Incas was reported to be lonely.

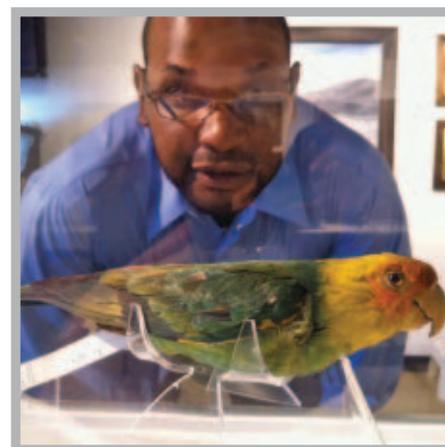
A century later and there's talk of "reversing" the crime. Parakeet fanciers discuss resequencing genes from dead birds in museum trays to reassemble a Frankenstein-esque *Conuropsis carolinensis*. For me, the de-extinction discussion is a hollow one. How does an organism adapt to the missing gaps in time when it didn't exist? How does a species absent for a century react to a landscape so dramatically altered as to present a different planet than the one it knew? Technology tells us it may not be an impossible task, but maybe

such tasks should be ones that we let pass. The whole of what a Carolina parakeet, or passenger pigeon, or Bachman's warbler was, will always be more than the engineered sum of its parts. In the century since Incas's eyes dimmed, we should let what we've done to make living things gone stand as monuments, so as to not let that history repeat itself.

At the time of Incas's death, there was no policy demanding notice or care for Carolina parakeets as an "endangered species"—such policies wouldn't exist for another fifty-five years. Maybe it wouldn't have mattered. And although policy and regulation are part of what we need to prevent tragedies like what happened to the parakeet, maybe something simpler is needed just as badly. If we see ourselves bound together in all of it—humans and nonhumans alike—then maybe care takes on a deeper meaning. We all require the same clean air and water, safe places to land, roost, and love whomever we choose. Treat others, regardless of plumage or color of skin, the way you long to be treated.

EVEN STILL, as I sat in my office, surrounded by my facsimiles and replicas of the Gone Birds, the parakeet left me longing for something I can't quite explain. I wanted, in my own way, to see the bird live again, to feel its animated, flying, screeching, and squawking for myself. There's a bit of a god complex in most ecologists. Most of us aren't just watchers and data miners, we're also wannabe creators.

And so I created my own parakeet, tacked and fastened together with wood glue and wanting. I worked for weeks researching the bird, trying to get a handle on the sense of it, its emergent being. After days of measuring, cutting, discarding, remeasuring, and recutting, I spent more days fitting and refitting the pieces together as if I could bring *Conuropsis carolinensis* back again. The wings at first were too wide—not fast enough to carry the bird quickly through the past. I narrowed them and posed them downward. How to pose the tail in profile? I first splayed it out, but then decided I wanted it straight as an arrow, so there'd be no delays in its travel. The bird's face needed to be parrot-esque accurate, parrot precise. I scroll-cut an eternal scream in the hawk-hooked beak mouth; could almost hear a muffled squawk. I layered on thin coats of painted plumage, then wiped them away to add another. Finally, after a fortnight of fussing, a last coat of subtle shading, and a little wish-conjuring, I set two bulging, brown taxidermy eyes in place, and shuddered a bit inside as something gone forever stared back. A Gone Bird lay in my hand ready to fly—and it seemed to be asking me why. I placed him among the rafters of my writing shack, where he now spins in the slightest breeze, bound for someplace far beyond my seeing. ○



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