

Delaware County Bird Club NEWSLETTER



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‘Country Roads Take Me Home’



(Above) Casey Tucker. (Below) Grasshopper Sparrow.

Traveling on country roads can be a great way to relax and escape the hustle and bustle and chaos of traffic, politics, and life in general, at least for a little while. Country roads can also be a great place to seek birds to photograph. This presentation will explore some of the birds Casey has encountered along quiet country roads, and sometimes not-so-quiet country roads.

Short Bio of Casey Tucker

Casey Tucker is a full-time instructor for the Ohio State University—Newark Campus and a part-time instructor for Otterbein University, in Westerville. He teaches courses like introductory biology, conservation biology, and birds. In his free time, he likes to de-stress by spending time with his wife and dogs and occasionally attempts to take pictures of birds, other wildlife, and the occasional plant. loves observing his favorite bird – the Carolina Wren.

DELAWARE COUNTY BIRD CLUB PROGRAMS

The Delaware County Bird Club in-person meetings and program presentations have resumed. They take place on the fourth Monday of each month, September through April, except in November and December when they are held on alternate days to accommodate the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Meetings are held in the lodge at Deer Haven Park at 4183 Liberty Road, Delaware Ohio, 43015. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., programs begin at 7 p.m., and are followed by reports of local bird sightings and socializing. Meeting dates can also be found on the Preservation Parks of Delaware County calendar at this link: <https://preservationparks.recdesk.com/Community/Calendar>



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Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon

By Richard Bradley

The last captive passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), Martha, died in the Cincinnati Zoo on the first of September of 1914.

This year there were a number of posts about the anniversary of this event in Facebook, including some with bogus photos of Rock Pigeons substituted for the Passenger Pigeon that she was. Perhaps this is because color photography was rare in the early 20th century, and the surviving photos of Martha are all black-and-white.

The current article is largely based on excerpts from the definitive volume written about the life and extinction of the passenger pigeon.

This book by A.W. Schorger, published in 1955 [The Passenger Pigeon: Its Natural History and Extinction. U. of Oklahoma Press, Norman] is a fascinating and sobering read.

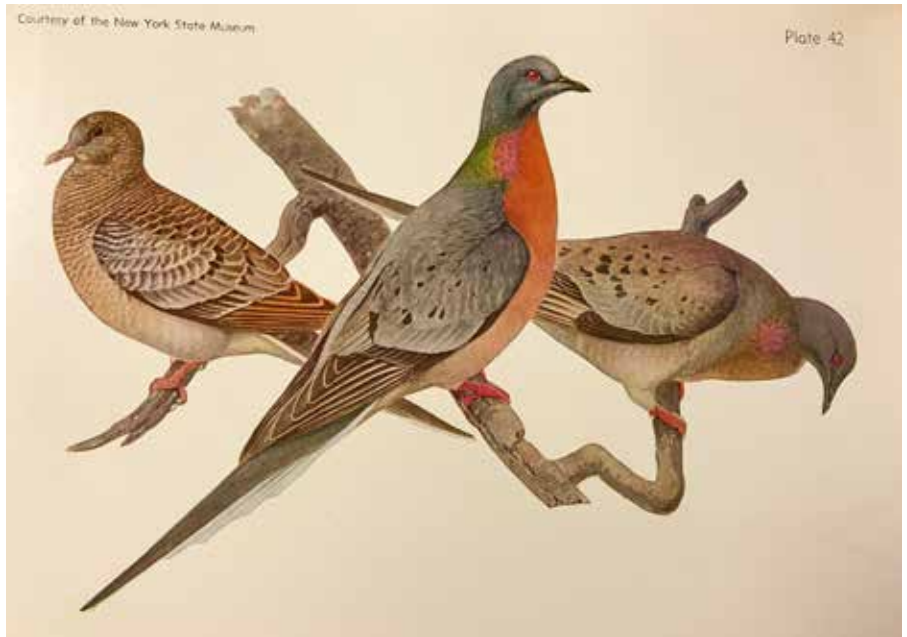
Arlie William Schorger (1884-1972) was born in Republic, Ohio. He studied at Wooster College and The Ohio State University. Here is a quote from the preface to his monograph that explains a bit of the context for his monumental effort to create this reference book.

Deep, youthful impressions are not easily effaced. One day while I was riding along the old Kilbourn Road in northern Ohio with my uncle, we came to a segment of the highway then bordered by fields. He told me that the area was once covered with a large beech forest.

In the spring when there were beechnuts on the ground, huge flocks of wild pigeons would appear. Their numbers were so great that the earth was shadowed and dung struck the dry leaves like hail. Men stood in the rift in the forest and fired at the passing birds until the road was dotted with their blue bodies, and more were killed than could be carried.

He ended by saying, "We will never see the like again."

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Louis Agassiz Fuertes from *Birds of America*, ed. T. Gilbert Pearson (copyright 1917, 1936)]. (Photo by Rich Bradley).



Martha.

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Here is Schorger's summary from the dust jacket:

The passenger pigeon was a species numbering three to five billion at the time of America's discovery. No appreciable decline in the passenger pigeon population appeared until the late 1870's, but thereafter the destruction took only twenty-five years. The last bird died in 1914 at the Cincinnati Zoological Garden before any competent ornithologist could write a detailed account of the species.

I think the best way to give you a sense of the abundance and remarkable decline to extinction of this species is by using quotations from contemporaries, and analysis of historical records.

One estimate of a flock of passenger pigeons was made by J.J. Audubon, published in his Ornithological Biography in 1831.

It may not, perhaps, be out of place to attempt an estimate of the number of Pigeons contained in one of those mighty flocks... The inquiry will tend to shew the astonishing bounty of the great Author of Nature in providing for the wants of his creatures. Let us take a column of one mile in breadth, which is far below the average size, and suppose it passing over us without interruption for three hours, at the rate mentioned above of one mile in the minute. This will give us a parallelogram of 180 miles by 1, covering 180 square miles. Allowing two pigeons to the square yard, we have One billion, one hundred and fifteen millions, one hundred and thirty-six thousand pigeons in one flock. [J.J. Audubon Ornithol. Biog., I (1831), 322.]

What follows is a description of shooting pigeons, a quote from Madam Riedesl of Chambly, Quebec 1777 [quoted by E. Osborn in W.B. Mershon, Passenger Pigeon, p. 112]

As we were passing through the wood, I saw, all at once, something like a cloud rise up before our wagon. We were at first frightened, until we discovered that it was a flock of wild pigeons, which they call here tourtes (turtle doves), and which are found in such numbers that the Canadian lives on them for more than six weeks at a time. He goes to one of these pigeon hunts with a gun loaded with the smallest shot; and when he comes in sight of them, he makes a noise. They fly up, and he fires into the midst of them, generally with considerable luck; for sometimes he wounds two or three hundred, which are afterwards beaten to death with sticks.

Here is one account of the business of netting and shipping huge numbers of passenger pigeons, from: F.E.S. "Netting Wild Pigeons" Forest and Stream, XLIII (1894), 28.

From 100 to 200 men have been engaged in the business of netting these birds all the time, and this number is increased by a great many local netters wherever the birds happen to nest... In this very large country there would seem to be every chance of losing a body of birds and not finding out where they are. But a very good system has been established for keeping track of them, which is specially looked after by the different express companies and the shippers and handlers of live and dead birds, who form another section of those interested in the history of the wild pigeon, before the epicure meets him at the table. When the body of birds leaves the South the local superintendents of the express companies are instructed to keep their eyes out for indications of a nesting, and the messengers generally are to report on their route. A correspondence of an inquisitive nature is carried on by every regular netter in order that he or his chums may strike the birds first. One may judge of the importance of the receipts to the express companies from the fact that a total of four to five thousand barrels of birds are shipped from each nesting, averaging thirty dozen to the barrel [1,440,000 to 1,800,000 birds], on which the charges are from \$6 to \$12 per barrel, which sometimes includes re-icing on the trip. This does not include the stall-fed birds for later market, nor the live birds for trap-shooting, and on which charges are 75 cents per crate of seventy-two birds to \$300 per carload, not the squabs, so that it is of considerable importance that no nesting be overlooked.

In 1896 Harry C. Oberholser, published A Preliminary List of the Birds of Wayne County, Ohio, and included this account:

Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*

This species is said to have been an abundant summer resident thirty years ago; at that time there having been a large roost in Newman's Swamp. By the clearing of large portions of the swamp the pigeons were driven away; but until about 1873 single pairs were to be found breeding in the vicinity of Orrville. During the past twenty years the species has been of only casual occurrence, the most recent dates of capture being September 19, 1888, and August 30, 1893; both single birds.

From Schorger's monograph this is his choice for the last verified record of a passenger pigeon taken in the wild:

The last records must be based on specimens taken accompanied by a satisfactory history. I am willing to accept as the very last record the specimen taken at Sargents, Pike County, Ohio on March 24, 1900.

In the early 20th century there were attempts to breed a small number of captive passenger pigeons in Wisconsin, Chicago, and Cincinnati. The captive breeding groups failed to produce young and did not thrive in captivity.

The last individual was Martha (named in honor of Martha Washington), she was a survivor of a small captive flock. She

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Can you identify this?



This mystery bird was photographed on 5 November, 2023 in Delaware County, Ohio.

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died on 1 September, 1914.

There is a beautiful mural located at 15 E. Eighth St. Cincinnati. It was based on the painting “Martha, The Last Passenger Pigeon” by John A. Ruthven. This mural reproduces an original masterpiece by Mr. Ruthven that shows Martha and her flock soaring over the historic Bird Run at the Cincinnati Zoo, and serves as a daily reminder to downtown residents, workers and visitors of the importance of wildlife conservation and the reality of extinction.

Mural created in partnership with the Cincinnati Nature Center.

“The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet again inspire the composer; but when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again.”

-Charles William Beebe 1906



Martha mural in Cincinnati photo Tim Parsley.