

PASSENGER PIGEON

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PUBLISHED FIGURES AND PLATES OF THE
EXTINCT PASSENGER PIGEON¹

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

(Photographs by the Author)

WITH the view of portraying its natural appearance in life, few birds, either living or extinct, have exceeded the Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) as a subject for artists and engravers. For nearly two centuries, representations of this now extinct species have been published in all sorts of avenues, ranging all the way from the cuts found in dictionaries and school-books to reproductions of life-size colored figures illustrating the most sumptuous of the world's great works devoted to ornithology. It would seem to be quite a safe statement to make that upwards of five hundred figures or more of this bird, published in many quarters of the world, have appeared, illustrating the great variety of accounts, both popular and scientific, that avian biographers have given us upon its natural history.

No species of bird known to man, in all time, can in any way rival the extraordinary series of chapters that go to make up the history of the life-span of this now totally extinct pigeon. As a story filled with romance, prodigality, cruelty and short-sightedness, it outranks the most unbelievable fables of the ancients. For one among many who witnessed the marvelous flight of these birds in the early seventies, I never for a moment thought how soon the species would be in the same category with those other birds, of which the world shall never again see living specimens. We can now only regretfully look back on the picture and systematize the data at hand with respect to the literary part of this, and not a little has been accomplished by those competent to undertake it. But with all this we have nothing to do here, as it is a subject quite apart from a consideration of what we have by way of portraits of a form that man shall never see again in life.

As just stated, there is a very extensive array of these portraits in the many biographies that have appeared of the bird, and they represent a great variety of grades of excellence, of caricature, of faithfulness, and of grotesqueness. Many of these will here be ignored, as they contribute nothing of any value in aiding one to correctly visualize our subject; indeed, in most instances, such cuts convey a decidedly

¹Read at the Thirty-eighth Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D. C., November, 1920.

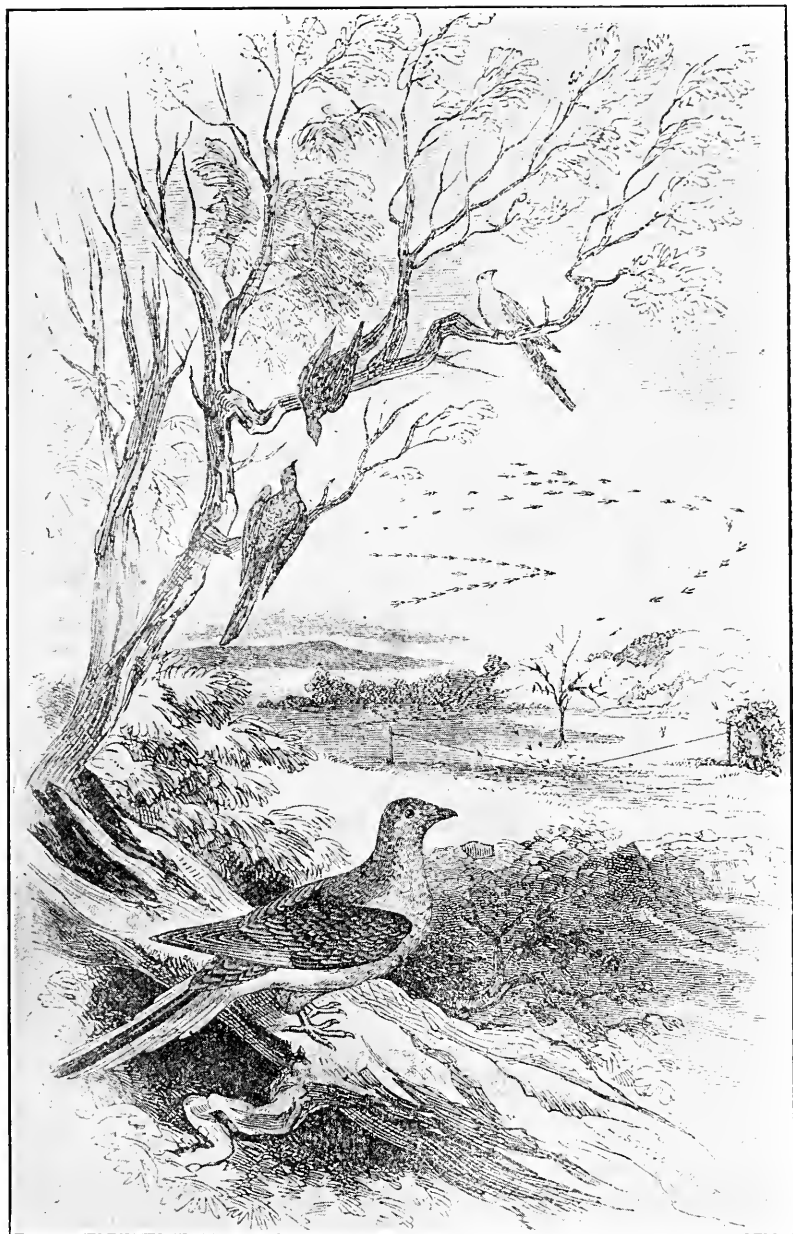


FIG. 1. AN OLD WOOD ENGRAVING FROM THE "ILLUSTRATED NATURAL HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM" BY L. G. GOODRICH

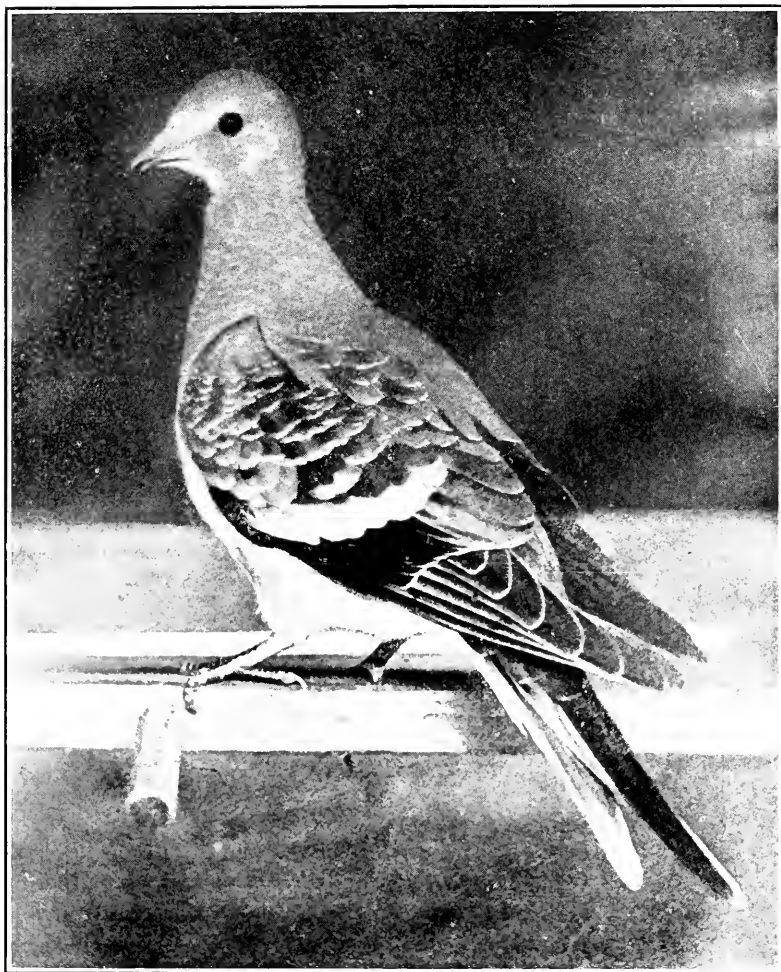


FIG. 2. AN IMMATURE WILD PIGEON. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY THE LATE DR.
C. O. WHITMAN

erroneous idea as to how this bird appeared in life. This statement may be relied upon coming from me, as not only have I shot a number of specimens of them and handled them afterwards, but I have seen them, close to, in all their natural attitudes in the forest; so that, with such opportunities, added to what faculties I may possess for memorizing the normal postures of birds in life, following upon a study of any particular species of them for that purpose, I may be more or less competent to judge of the faithfulness of portrayal in any picture of the wild pigeon which, up to the present time, has been published.

Turning first, then, to a few of the minor cuts that have appeared of this bird, it is to be noted that they are of a great variety, and based on all sorts of data. Some are reduced woodcuts, or electros, or half-tones, made from the large plates in the standard works of the world's recognized ornithologists. Some are fanciful pictures reproduced from drawings made by those who knew nothing of the wild pigeon, or who had examined the figures or plates of others possessing more or less reliable data upon which to base such productions. Not a few are represented by excellent examples of pictorial piracy, with widely varying success as to correctness of copy; in the case of still others, attempts have been made to conceal the piracy, and the value of the result rests upon the skill of the artist to succeed in such a trick. In a few instances, the pirated picture appears to be truer to nature than the one from which it was copied. And, again, such copies are duly acknowledged, either under the cut or in the text which accompanies it.

L. G. Goodrich published his "Illustrated Natural History of the Animal Kingdom" in 1861; it carried 1,500 engravings in the two volumes, and came off the presses of Derby and Jackson, of New York City. On page 231 of Volume II. there is an attractive woodcut of the wild pigeon engraved by Lossing and Barritt. (Fig. 1.) In the foreground a single adult bird faces to the right, standing on the trunk of a fallen tree; in the middle distance there are three more of these birds in a tree to the left, while in the background we have a man, partly concealed in a "blind," netting pigeons. Numerous birds are on the ground; others are in a near-by tree, while still others are coming down to the lure, and a few others are, apparently, for the moment passing in the form of an acute angle, with one bird directly behind another in the two lines forming it.

Whether this is the place where this picture was first published, I am unable to state; but I am inclined to believe that it is not, for the reason that we find, in Thomas Nuttall's "A Manual of the Ornithology of the United States," a picture of a wild pigeon which is evidently the counterpart of the one in Goodrich. Here it is larger, however, and the bird is turned to the left; the surroundings are changed some-

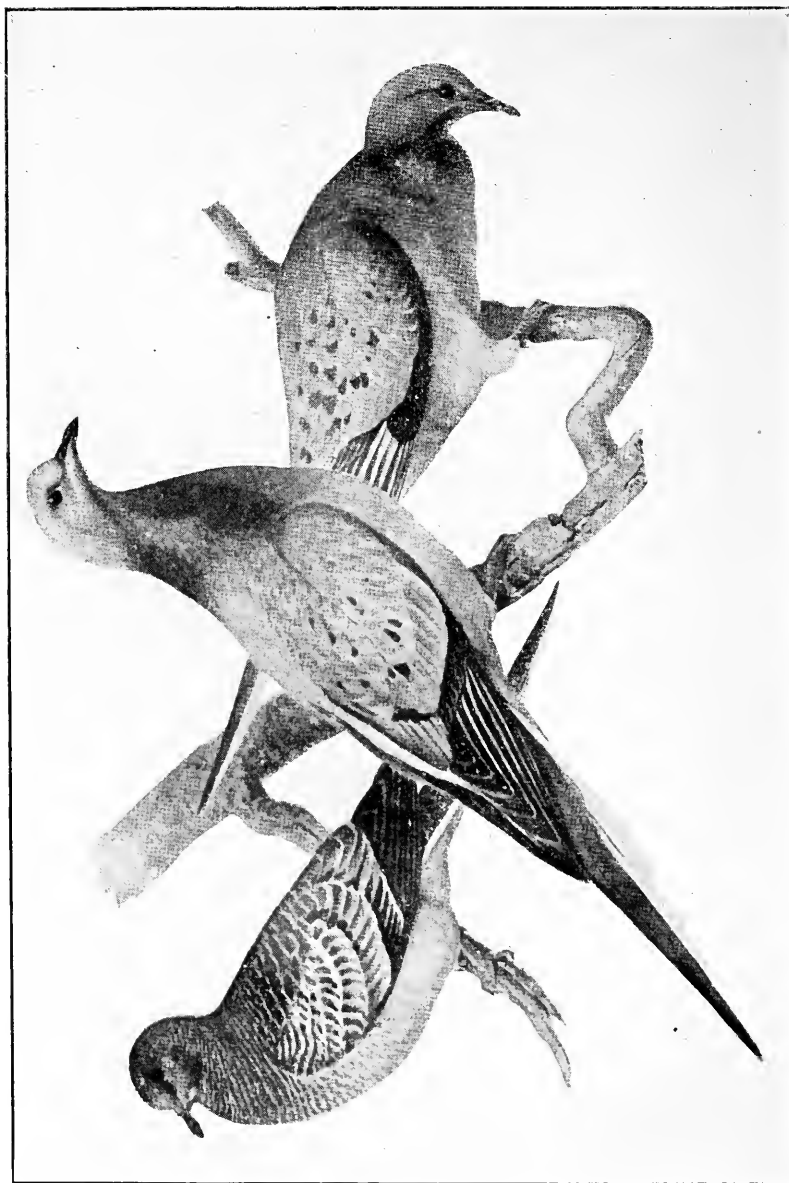


FIG. 3. A GROUP OF WILD PIGEONS FROM EATON'S "BIRDS OF NEW YORK." LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES PAINTED THIS FINE PICTURE, WHICH CONSISTS OF AN ADULT PAIR AND A BIRD-OF-THE-YEAR

what, and the tree in the middle distance is absent. But in the background we find the same scene as in Goodrich, apart from a few trivial changes. This cut is on page 28 of Volume I. of Nuttall—the *Land Birds*—the account of the Wild Pigeon being on pages 628 to 635 inclusive. As this volume is dated 1832, or twenty-nine years before the Goodrich volume was published, it is evident that a still earlier cut of the kind existed, which was drawn upon by both the authors, or, what is more likely, Goodrich's engravers or his artist made up a wild pigeon scene for the work, and copied Nuttall's figure in the foreground, simply turning it to the right and slightly reducing it. Such procedures were by no means uncommon in those times—a fact one soon appreciates after studying the various published pictures of the Wild Pigeon. Nuttall acknowledges who engraved for him in his Preface to Volume I., on page vi., where he says: "The wood engravings, not sufficiently numerous in consequence of their cost, have been executed by Mr. Bowen, of Boston, and Mr. Hall, in the employ of Messrs. Carter and Andrews, of Lancaster." Cambridge was the place of publication.

To illustrate the word "pigeon" or "passenger-pigeon," we sometimes find our extinct wild one selected for the purpose, and a good example of this is seen in the case of the "Century Dictionary," where Thompson-Seton gives us a figure that is far above the average of such cuts in points of excellence.

Perhaps Wilson's rather quaint but attractive figure of the bird has been more extensively used as the basis for smaller cuts than that of any other artist. For example, Tenney used it in his text-book on zoology, and Coues, borrowing it from him, reproduced it on page 711 of Volume II. of the fifth edition of his "Key to North American Birds." To some extent, this cut was altered; for, as we know, Wilson represented his wild pigeon as standing on the top of a sawn-off stump of a tree, while the cuts in Tenney's and in Coues have the bird standing on the ground. In doing this, no change was made in the posing of the feet.

As we know, T. M. Brewer published an edition of Wilson's "American Ornithology" in 1852; and of all the colored plates known to me, the ones illustrating this work are the most unsatisfactory and incorrectly colored. They were reduced from the plates in Wilson's folio edition to a three-half, six-half size; and in my personal copy of this work, the plate carrying the wild pigeon is so inserted as to cause the bird to be up-side down. It has been tinted a curious shade of purple, with pale purple outer tail feathers, and with a bright pink breast. In this respect Audubon fared much better; for, with the exception of a few indifferent cuts based on his magnificent plate of a pair of Wild Pigeons, the latter has been reproduced in color in several works, a



FIG. 4. REPRODUCTION OF AUDUBON'S PLATE OF THE WILD PIDGEON

strikingly beautiful example of which may be seen in that most valuable and interesting book on the bird by W. B. Mershon, given us in 1907 by the Outing Publishing Company. This volume has two reproductions of photographs of mounted specimens of the Passenger Pigeon that are above the average in the point of excellence; and, finally, it has a beautiful plate of Dr. C. O. Whitman's photograph from life of an immature bird of this species. (Fig. 2).

An admirable plate in color of a pair of Passenger Pigeons by Fuertes occurs as the frontispiece to the work just mentioned, the same having been used by various other authors. This painting was done in 1904, since which time, for all I know to the contrary, this most industrious avian artist may have given us other colored plates of this species,—at least I find a very beautiful one, and I may say a very faithful one, in the first volume of Eaton's magnificent work "The Birds of New York," where it is shown on Plate 42, upper figure, the group consisting of a pair of adults and a young bird. (Fig. 3). In my opinion, this is one of the most accurate, and decidedly the most pleasing of all the colored figures of the Wild Pigeon that have appeared up to date. It leads Audubon's plate for the reason that it is such a restful one to study, while in the case of Audubon's, the error he committed in so many of his representations of birds is there repeated—that is to say, that in technical ornithological works the portraits of birds should never be shown in unusual poses or performing some action. (Fig. 4). In this criticism I found myself in agreement with the late, very distinguished British Ornithologist, Alfred Newton, who, many years ago, wrote me to that effect.

Eaton's "Birds of New York" bears date of 1910—that is, three years after Mershon, and two years before the splendid volume of Forbush appeared on "A History of the Game Birds, Wild Fowl, and Shore Birds of Massachusetts and Adjacent States"—a work too well known to ornithologists to require description here. In it we find three plates devoted to the Passenger Pigeon, one being of a beautifully mounted specimen, while the remaining two are of exceptional value, in as much as they are reproductions of photographs of living specimens of the bird itself. In so far as my knowledge carries, these are the only pictures of the kind extant. I have already referred to one of them as being an illustration in Mershon's work "The Passenger Pigeon," that is, the one reproduced from C. O. Whitman's photograph; the other, here to be noticed, is the reproduction of the last of all the Passenger Pigeons that ever lived: It is the Enno Meyer photograph, taken of the bird when it lived in the Zoological Garden of Cincinnati. (Fig. 5). It is quite unnecessary to comment on the value of this picture or its uniqueness, as it represents one of those things that can never be repeated.



FIG. 5. THE PASSENGER PIGEON IN LIFE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ENNO MEYER OF THE BIRD THAT LIVED IN THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS OF CINCINNATI, OHIO

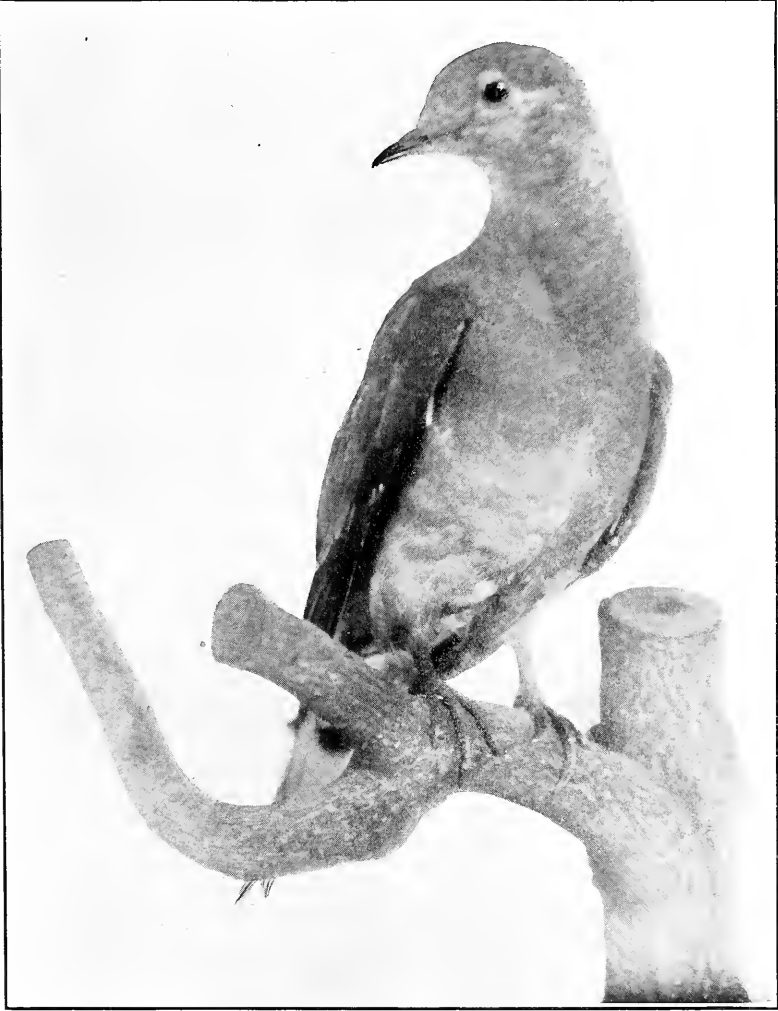


FIG. 6. SAME SPECIMEN AS SHOWN IN FIGURE 5. MOUNTED AFTER ITS DEATH BY THE LATE MR. NELSON R. WOOD, AND NOW IN THE EXHIBITION SERIES OF THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM



FIG. 7. THE COLORED FIGURE OF THE WILD PIGEON AS SHOWN IN THE WORK OF JAMES DE KAY ("NEW YORK FAUNA.")

This bird, after its death, was preserved by Mr. Wm. Palmer at my residence, and I have published an account of its gross anatomy. There are three other negatives of it posed by me at the photographic galleries of the United States National Museum, and they present the three different views of the specimen, namely the ventral, the dorsal and the lateral ones. After this specimen was mounted, I was permitted to make a photograph of it, and this latter has been published in *The Conservationist*, of Albany, N. Y., and in *American Forestry*, of Washington. (Fig. 6).

If there be a figure of the Wild Pigeon in "The Game Birds of the United States" by the late Dr. D. G. Elliott, I do not recall it, for a copy of that work has not been in my hands for many years. This is not the case, however, with respect to the "Zoology of New York," or the "New York Fauna," by James E. de Kay. Part II. of this well-known and much criticized work is devoted to the Birds, and on page 196 there is an half-page account of "*Ectopistes migratoria*." The figure of the bird in color, five-eighths natural size, is a male, engraved by J. W. Hill and lithographed by Endicott of New York. It is Plate 74, being a rather pleasing, not to say fairly correct representation of the species. (Fig. 7).

Coues, in his Biographical Appendix, gives the date of publication of this work as 1884, and says that the birds "are figured in colored lithographs, each plate containing two or three figures. The plates are all recognizable illustrations, but not of the highest order of artistic merit, the drawing being especially defective." (p. 633.)

There has been published at least one plate on which is given no fewer than fourteen Passenger Pigeons, representing both sexes and young in apparently typical plumages. This is Plate XXIX, opposite page 32 of "Studer's Popular Ornithology—The Birds of North America,"—a work illustrated throughout by Dr. Theodore Jasper, and edited and published under copyright in 1881 by Jacob H. Studer and Co., of New York and Columbus, Ohio. (Fig 8). Neither the text nor the plates of this folio volume seem to have met with favor in the eyes of ornithologists anywhere; but of all this interesting history nothing will be recorded here.

To appreciate Alexander Wilson's figure of the Wild Pigeon, one should see it in Volume V. of his folio set, which was published in Philadelphia in 1812. We find it to be Figure I. on Plate 44, opposite page 102, where it is designated as *Columbia migratoria*, and represented to be of natural size. On the same plate we find Figure II., the Blue Mountain Warbler, and Figure III., the Hemlock Warbler (Fig 9). There is a peculiar quaintness and charm about Wilson's figures of birds that attaches but to few others. I must believe that their pathetic history has something to do with all this, for we know that Wilson drew all his own figures of birds, while they were engraved



FIG. 8. DOCTOR JASPER'S GROUP OF THE FOURTEEN WILD PIGEONS, FROM STUDER'S
"THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA." (PL. XXIX.)

by I. G. Warnicke, of the firm of Messrs. Lawson, Murray, and Warnicke, his printers being Messrs. R. and W. Carr, a Philadelphia firm of note in those days.

There is but one criticism I would make of the Wild Pigeon as portrayed by Wilson; it is that the sawn-off stump upon which it stands is altogether too small. As the bird had a length between 16 and 17 inches, we can readily calculate what the diameter of that stump must have been. Surely the tree could not have been of a size sufficiently large to demand *sawing across* to fell it! This discrepancy has doubtless been observed by others—hence the placing of Wilson's Wild Pigeon on the ground in some of our modern text-books in zoology.

On page 10 of his preface, Wilson gives us a paragraph, the sentiment of which is quite as true to-day as in his time; he says: "Let but the generous hand of patriotism be stretched forth to assist and cherish the rising arts and literature of our country, and both will most assuredly, and that at no remote period, shoot forth, increase, and flourish with a vigor, a splendor, and usefulness inferior to no other on Earth."

In skimming through that most useful piece of work, the Biographical Appendix of Dr. Elliott Coues, we meet with various other works, of a minor sort or otherwise, in which cuts of the Wild Pigeon occur, or may occur, as those of E. A. Samuels, W. L. Bailey, W. P. Turnbull, and others. In the important ornithological works of Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway, only the heads of the birds described are figured; while in Mr. Ridgway's well-known "Manual" we find but an excellent character drawing, giving in outline simply the head, wing, tail, and foot of the Passenger Pigeon.

There is a quaint figure of the bird under consideration in the early work of P. Kalm, published in 1772, and entitled "Travels Into North America," with a very lengthy sub-title. The plate of the Wild Pigeon is opposite page 74; while in 1785, or thirteen years after Kalm published, there appeared the well-known classic of T. Pennant, entitled "Arctic Zoology." Here a very crude engraving of the Passenger Pigeon is given on the same plate (which is No. XIV.) with the Caroline Dove. (Fig. 10). This I examined in a copy of the work formerly in the personal library of the late Dr. Edgar A. Mearns, which is now in the library of the United States National Museum. Who engraved this plate is a fact still unknown to me, while the work was printed by Henry Hughs, of London. Volume II. is devoted to the Birds, which are grouped in Class II., and it is on page 322 that we find treated Order IV., the *Columbine*, under which a brief account of the Wild Pigeon is given.

Ornithologists are familiar with the remarkable history that attaches to the great folio work on Pigeons, of which C. J. Temminck is



FIG. 9. THE PASSENGER PIGEON AS GIVEN US BY ALEXANDER WILSON. FIGURE 1 ON PLATE XLIV. OF HIS FOLIO SET

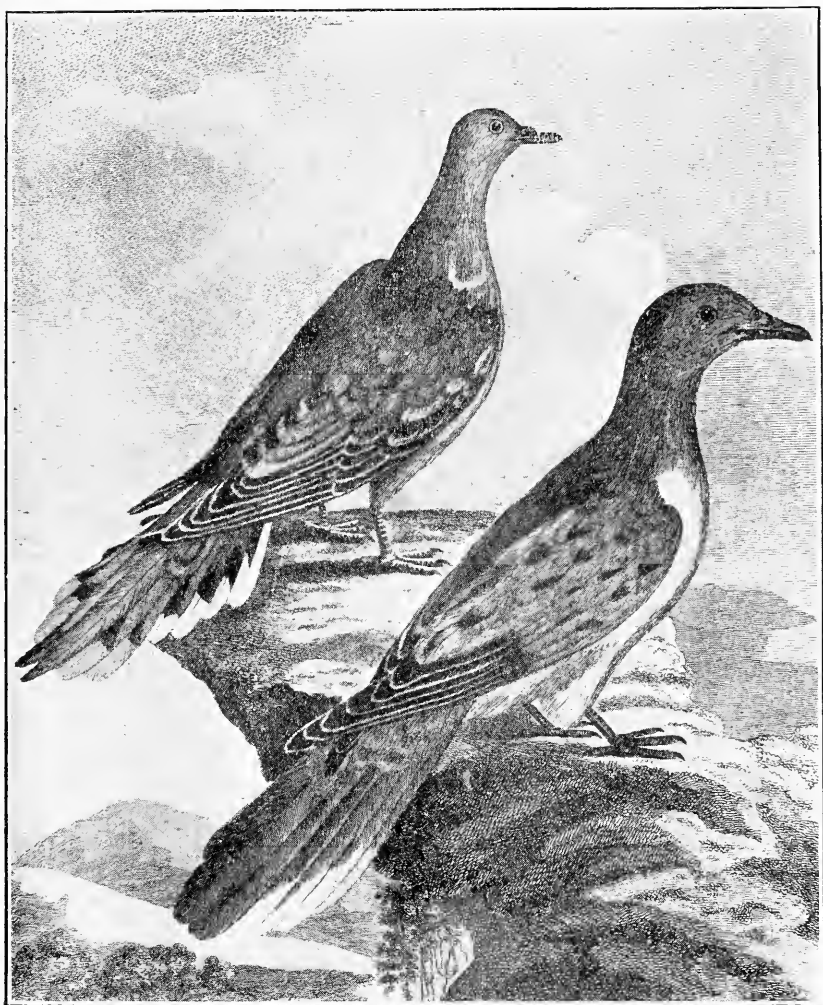


FIG. 10. PLATE FROM PENNANT'S "ARCTIC ZOOLOGY." CAROLINA DOVE IN THE FOREGROUND AND WILD PIGEON BEYOND. (PL. XIV.)



FIG. 11. MADAME KNIP'S PAINTING OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN HER PIRATED EDITION AS WELL AS IN TEMMINCK'S THE LATTER BEING THE AUTHOR OF THE TEXT OF THE WORK

the author, and which was published in 1808 to 1811; and how it was pirated, as a whole, by Madame Knip, née Pauline de Courcelles, at the time it was issued. Madame Knip was the artist who painted the life-size colored figures of the large number of pigeons figured in this work, while they were engraved by Cesar Macret, of Paris. Each species is given a plate to itself, and that of the Wild Pigeon is No. 48, which is said to be a male bird. As an artistic picture, it is excellent; but as a correct figure of the species it purports to represent, it is a failure. The model was evidently a skin, and this may account for the small head and bill, but not for the short tail that Madame Knip has endowed it with. (Fig. 11).

In 1857 to 1858, Charles Lucien Bonaparte published his magnificent folio, entitled "Iconographic des Pigeons;" but as the plates only gave such species as were not figured by Madame Knip, the Passenger Pigeon does not appear in it.

We next have to consider the work of Heinrich Gottlieb Ludwig Reichenbach, who was born at Leipzig on the 8th of January, 1793, and who died March 17, 1879, which made him eighty-six years of age at the time of his death. He was the author of a work on the Columbidae, entitled "The Complete Account of the Natural History of the Pigeons and Pigeon-like Birds," a copy of which I have examined. It appeared in Dresden, in the German language, as a folio volume apart from the text, and illustrated with colored plates. With respect to the text of this work, I am indebted to Dr. Richmond for the opportunity to examine it. It was probably published about 1861, being unbound, and of a much smaller size than the plates. The account of the Wild Pigeon on pp. 81-85 is chiefly from Audubon and others. Plate 154 of the bound plates is devoted to *Ectopistes migratorius* (Fig 12), of which there are three figures in color resting on the limb of a tree; they are numbered 1374, 1378, and 1379, and all three are but indifferent representations of the species he aimed to delineate.

Reichenbach evidently got his middle figure of the Wild Pigeon from John Prideaux Selby's work, entitled "The Natural History of Pigeons," which appeared in Edinburgh in 1835, being one of the demi-octavos of *The Naturalists' Library*, edited by Sir William Jardine. It is the volume devoted to the Pigeons, and is illustrated by 32 colored plates of those birds together with numerous woodcuts. An account of the Passenger Pigeon, or, as Selby called it, the "Passenger Turtle," is given in Volume V. on pages 177 to 188 inclusive, the colored figure of the bird being Plate 19, opposite page 176. There is no question but that Reichenbach reproduced this figure in his plate; changed the limb and scenery, and then added another figure of the pigeon on either side of it, which he may possibly have obtained from still other sources. In doing this, the Selby figure was somewhat reduced



FIG. 12. A GROUP OF PASSENGER PIGEONS FROM THE ORNITHOLOGICAL WORK OF REICHENBACH'S

in size. E. Lear drew Selby's figures of the pigeons, and they were engraved by Lizars.

We may now enquire as to who published the first figure or plate representing the Wild Pigeon; and, in so far as I have been able to discover, it would seem to have been Mark Catesby, whose elephant folio work appeared in 1771; it is entitled "The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and Bahama Islands, with a lengthy sub-title. The colored plate of the Wild Pigeon occurs in Volume I., and is Plate 23, its caption being "The Pigeon of Passage" (*Palumbus Migratorius*). (Fig. 13).

The bird is quite recognizable, although figured in the quaint style so characteristic of the ornithological artists of those times. The accessories consist of the leaves and acorns of the Red Oak, the bird standing on the upper surface of one of the separated leaves, the indications being that the leaf is on the ground and not floating in mid-air.

There is an elaborate Preface to this work (pp. V.-XII.), on page XI of which Catesby tells us that "As I was not bred a Painter, I hope some faults in Perspective, and other Niceties may be more readily excused, for I humbly conceive Plants, and other Things done in a Flat, tho' exact manner may serve the Purpose of Natural History, better in some Measure than in a bold and Painter like way. In designing the Plants, I always did them while fresh and just gathered: And the Animals, particularly the Birds, I painted them while alive (except a few) and gave them their Gestures peculiar to every kind of Bird, and where it would admit of, I have adapted the Bird to those Plants on which they fed, or have any Relation to."

Catesby had considerable trouble, on account of the expense, in securing an engraver; but as he adds in his Preface, "At length by the Kind Advice and Instructions of that inimitable Painter Mr. Joseph Goupy, I undertook and was initiated in the way of Etching them myself, which, though I may not have done in a Graver-like manner, choosing rather to omit their method of cross-Hatching, and to follow the humour of the Feathers, which is more laborious, and I hope has proved more to the purpose."

Next follows a long discussion of the colors used in this work, and other matters of interest.

This ancient classic is still consulted from time to time, and we turn to it for many reasons in a reverential way; and by no means the least one of the reasons is, that nearly a century and a half ago, its author published for us a plate of the Passenger Pigeon, little dreaming as he did so that this splendid species, then existing in unnumbered millions in this country, would so soon be utterly exterminated by those living in the regions where it occurred.

It would appear that Count de Buffon never published a figure or

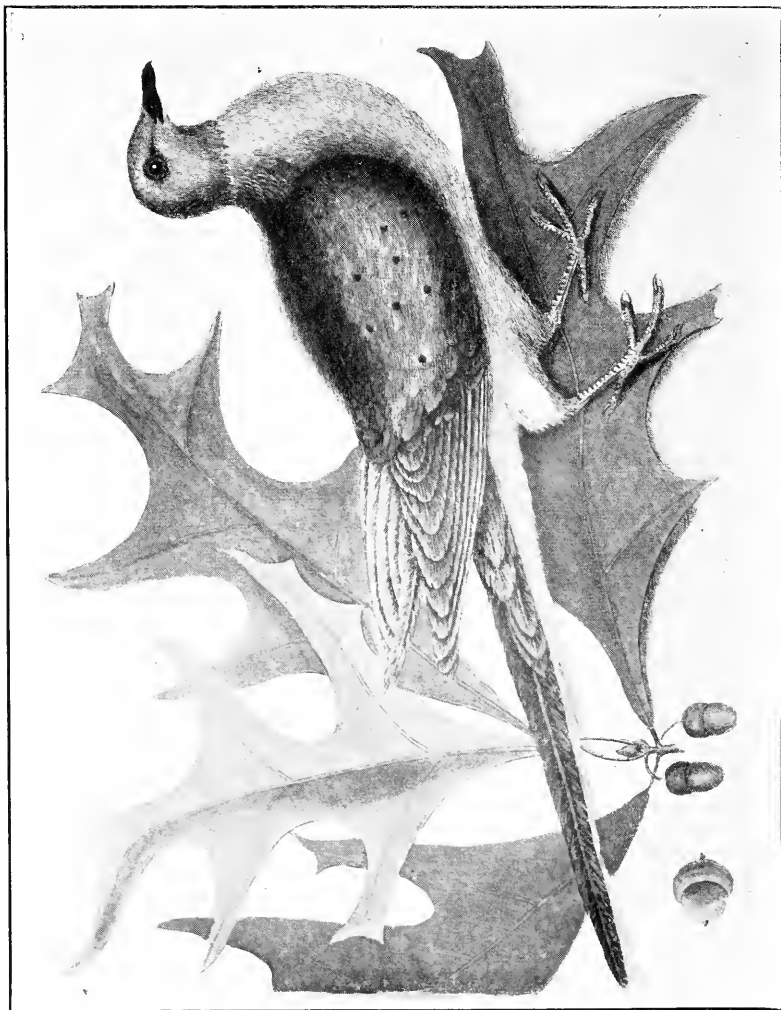


FIG. 13. PROBABLY THE FIRST PLATE OF THE WILD PIGEON PUBLISHED. A PHOTOGRAPHIC COPY OF THE PIGEON IN MARK CATESBY'S ORNITHOLOGY (1771)

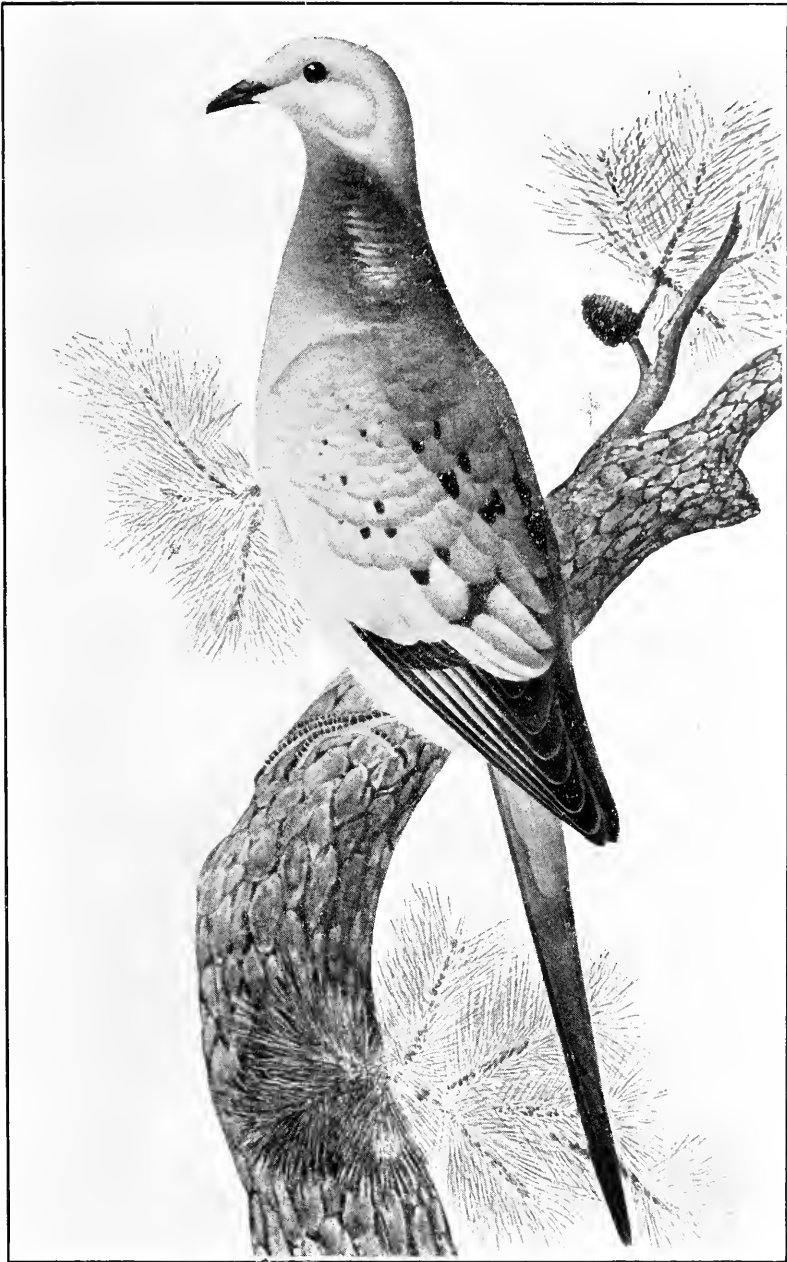


FIG. 14. HAYASHI'S FIGURE OF THE MALE WILD PIGEON IN THE WORK OF
DR. C. O. WHITMAN



FIG. 15. BY THE SAME ARTIST WHO PAINTED THE PIGEON HERE SHOWN IN FIGURE 14. THIS IS THE FEMALE, AND IS PLATE 29 OF WHITMAN'S WORK ON THE PIGEONS

plate of the Wild Pigeon; but we find one in Daubenton that appeared in about the year 1780. This latter is a small quarto with colored plates, but no text. It was intended to illustrate, or rather be a complimentary work to Buffon, illustrating what the latter had published on birds. Daubenton gives a colored plate, No. 176, of an immature Passenger Pigeon, which he designates as the "*Tourterelle du Canada*" which is recognizable, but hardly anything more; it is about two-thirds the size of life.

Thomas E. Eyton published, in 1836, a small octavo in London, which he entitled "*A History of the Rarer British Birds.*" On page 30 there is a small woodcut of the Passenger Pigeon which is fairly good, and he says of the species that "Our authority for introducing it into this work, as a member of the British Fauna, rests upon a specimen mentioned by Dr. Fleming in his '*History of British Animals*,' shot at Westhall, in the parish of Monymead, Fifeshire, on the 31st of December, 1825. The feathers were quite fresh and entire, like those of a wild bird. The specimen in question was presented to Dr. Fleming by the Rev. A. Esplin, schoolmaster at Monymead." This specimen was evidently a "straggler" and very different from introduced birds, such as the lot that Audubon is responsible for turning loose in England in 1830—an exploit described in Smart's "*Birds of the British List.*"

I have stated that it was perhaps Catesby who published the first plate of our Wild Pigeon; and it may now be asked: who holds the honor of having published the last plate of the bird? This is an event of only about a year ago, when the posthumous works of Charles Otis Whitman appeared. This great treatise, entitled "*Inheritance, Fertility, and the Dominance of Sex and Color in Hybrids of Wild Species of Pigeons*," is edited by Mr. Oscar Riddle, and published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in four handsome quarto volumes. Its carefully executed colored plates were engraved by the Hoen Company, of Baltimore, and two plates of the Passenger Pigeon occur in the second volume. They are reproductions of the work of the well-known Japanese artist, Hayashi. Plate 28 (Fig. 14) represents an adult male bird (x. 06), and has not a little to recommend it. It may be suggested, however, that the limb upon which the specimen is represented as standing, is too vertical for the pose the artist has given the bird.

The female, to which Plate 29 is devoted, (Fig. 15) is better, and to me, a far more pleasing figure. It is of an adult individual and beautifully tinted (x 0.05). Mr. Hayashi also painted the picture of which this plate is a copy—indeed, I believe he is responsible for all the colored plates that illustrate this superb work—a veritable monument to the department of scientific ornithology of which it treats.





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