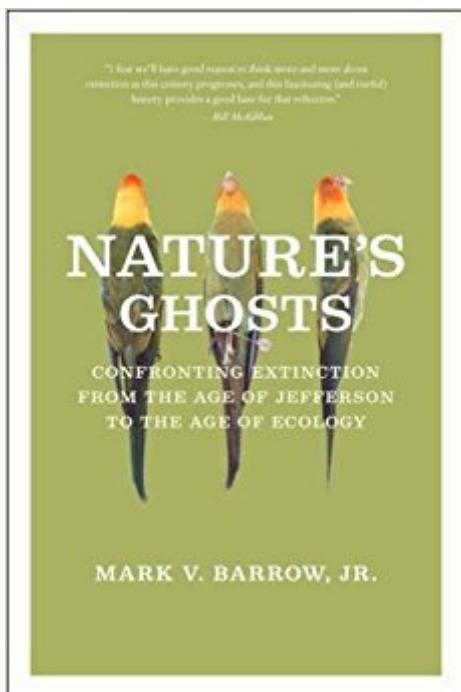


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# Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction From The Age Of Jefferson To The Age Of Ecology



## Synopsis

The rapid growth of the American environmental movement in recent decades obscures the fact that long before the first Earth Day and the passage of the Endangered Species Act, naturalists and concerned citizens recognized and worried about the problem of human-caused extinction. As Mark V. Barrow reveals in *Nature's Ghosts*, the threat of species loss has haunted Americans since the early days of the republic. From Thomas Jefferson's day when the fossil remains of such fantastic lost animals as the mastodon and the woolly mammoth were first reconstructed through the pioneering conservation efforts of early naturalists like John James Audubon and John Muir, Barrow shows how Americans came to understand that it was not only possible for entire species to die out, but that humans themselves could be responsible for their extinction. With the destruction of the passenger pigeon and the precipitous decline of the bison, professional scientists and wildlife enthusiasts alike began to understand that even very common species were not safe from the juggernaut of modern, industrial society. That realization spawned public education and legislative campaigns that laid the foundation for the modern environmental movement and the preservation of such iconic creatures as the bald eagle, the California condor, and the whooping crane. A sweeping, beautifully illustrated historical narrative that unites the fascinating stories of endangered animals and the dedicated individuals who have studied and struggled to protect them, *Nature's Ghosts* offers an unprecedented view of what we've lost and a stark reminder of the hard work of preservation still ahead.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"To the naturalist, who exults in the magnificent diversity of life, nothing is more devastating than the current mass extinction event, caused entirely by humans. In this intriguing book, Mark Barrow confronts the paradox of naturalists collecting specimens of imperiled species and striving to be value-free, while becoming intensely concerned about extinction. Barrow shows through a fascinating series of case studies that, despite some contradictions and ironies, the traditions of natural history, ecology, and field biology have been essential to the conservation movement from the late eighteenth century until today. We should be worried, as is Barrow, that the naturalist tradition is fading from our universities, museums, and indeed our entire culture." (Reed F. Noss, author of *The Science of Conservation Planning*) "I fear we'll have good reason to think more and more about extinction as this century progresses, and this fascinating (and rueful) history provides a good base for that reflection." (Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy*) "At a time when the specter of extinction hangs over much of the natural world, it's remarkable to think that the very concept of a species disappearing was once incomprehensible, even to educated scientists. In *Nature's Ghosts*, Mark Barrow brings his customary insight to the fascinating story of how humanity slowly recognized its impact on biodiversity, and the largely forgotten conservation heroes who battled steep odds to preserve what remains of the wild world." (Scott Weidensaul, author of *Of a Feather* and *Living on the Wind* (Scott Weidensaul, author of *Of a Feather* and *Living on the Wind*)) "Long before the birth of the modern American environmental movement, naturalists recognized the problem of human-caused extinction. Barrow offers a concise but richly detailed chronological history beginning with Thomas Jefferson and his interest in the fossils of woolly mammoths being discovered in the West. . . . Essential for anyone interested in our environmental past or concerned about our future." (Library Journal starred review) "Mr. Barrow's admirably thorough record of America's efforts to preserve the natural world makes fascinating, if sometimes alarming, reading." (Washington Times) "Barrow has produced something noteworthy--the definitive prehistory of conservation biology in America. The book is especially strong in its treatment of the underappreciated cohort of field biologists between William T. Hornaday and Aldo Leopold." (Science) "Barrow retraces the history of the earliest European and North American naturalists, from those who refused to believe that species comprising a perfect, stable world could go extinct, to the acceptance of extinction at the hands of humans and the legal

mechanisms created to halt it. Although this may be familiar to some, Barrow's focus on the central role of amateur/professional naturalists sheds much new light on how conservation ideas germinated and flowered in the US. The book focuses largely on animals, with numerous engaging stories, e.g., Thomas Jefferson's obsession with finding live mammoths in the West and a 1935 Cornell University trip that located some of the last ivory-billed woodpeckers in Louisiana. *Nature's Ghosts* is thoroughly researched with hundreds of helpful references, but remains very accessible and engaging to both casual and professional readers. Numerous black-and-white photos of extinct/endangered species along with famous and lesser-known naturalists enrich the text. Professionals in ecology, conservation biology, and wildlife management and readers interested in natural history will find this book hard to put down. Highly recommended. Academic, general, and professional readers, all levels." (Choice)"With rich source material and a compelling story, this book should become the definitive account of conservation biology prior to the Endangered Species Act. . . . *Nature's Ghost* deserves a wide audience. It would make a strong text for courses in history and environmental studies. By weaving together multiple disciplines, the text offers a solid introduction to the history of ecology and evolution, the history of environmentalism, and environmental ethics. . . . At the same time, the book offers valuable insight into the broader social movements and political discussions that determine the fate of many species." (Kevin Francis *Journal of the History of Biology*) "Mark Barrow knows more about the history of wildlife biology and conservation in the United States than anyone else. In these pages he gives us the most comprehensive picture we have of how naturalists discovered species extinction and humanity's role in it, then set about to take responsibility for the destruction of the bison, the bald eagle, the spotted owl, and so many other creatures, even in far off Latin America and Africa. Well researched and clearly told." (Donald Worster, author of *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir and Nature's Economy: The History of Ecological Ideas*)

Mark V. Barrow Jr. is associate professor of history at Virginia Tech and the author of *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon*.

Perfect for a biologist interested in extinction issues. As a writer, I found it to be over my head although, it's a finely written book.

Early Europeans viewed North America as a place of incredibly diverse and seemingly inexhaustible natural riches. Settlers couldn't believe the abundance of birds and fish and useful furry animals.

How that view slowly - very slowly, in fits and starts and with many advances and retreats - changed to a modern view of conservation, losing many key species along the way, is the subject of Barrows' well-written and thorough treatment. I've not come across a book like this, which introduces people both famous and forgotten, organizations that evolved into modern conservation forces, and the contradictions of naturalists who worried about extinction even as they shot and collected every specimen in sight. You know of the work of John James Audubon and Aldo Leopold, but Victor Shelford? John C. Phillips? The American Committee for International Wildlife Protection? With other people, like Archie Carr, I knew of them but hadn't realized just how influential they were. I thought I was fairly well read on this topic, but I found surprises on every page, and there are 82 pages of endnotes to reinforce the 360-page main story. This truly is a landmark work. Matt Bille, author, *Shadows of Existence: Discoveries and Speculations in Zoology* (Hancock, 2006)

This is an excellent book that I originally checked out at the library but ended up purchasing because it was so good. The author did a fantastic job of researching extinction for this book and it is packed with information. The references section is very long and perfectly organized in a way that you can easily find where each citation throughout the book came from. This allows you to read further from that source if you are interested in a particular subject. This book should appeal to anyone interested in wildlife conservation, extinction history, nature, wildlife, or even someone looking for interesting quotations.

*Nature's Ghosts* is destined to be a classic in the history of American conservation. It fills in lacunae in existing conservation histories by (1) documenting how scientific understandings of species extinctions unfolded from the mid 18th century onward, (2) explaining in more detail than any other work the critical role that American scientific naturalists played, from the late 19th century, in fostering understanding, concern, and political action in response to anthropogenic species extinctions, both in America and internationally, and (3) demonstrating the profound changes in perceptions and values that have accompanied increasing concern about species extinctions in America and abroad. Highly recommended for anyone seeking to understand the entire range of contributions to conservation history, but it should be read along with several other essential studies which complement it in their own ways, including *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Studies in Environment and History), *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Fourth Edition, *American Conservation Movement: John Muir And His Legacy*, and *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*.

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