



Martha, the Last Passenger Pigeon

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

At 1 p.m. on September 1, 1914, the world's last passenger pigeon, Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoological Garden (Cincinnati Zoo). Passenger pigeons (also called the 'wild pigeon') were once extremely abundant in North America, and it is thought that they comprised 20 to 40 percent of the bird population in the United States. Passenger pigeons migrated in very large flocks, some estimated to contain a billion birds. There are accounts of flocks so large that they stretched from horizon to horizon, blackening out the sky. By 1850, the number of passenger pigeons dropped sharply due to over-hunting, deforestation, and disease. Hunters were permitted to kill thousands of these birds at a time, leaving too few left to repopulate the species. The Cincinnati Zoo offered a \$1,000 reward for anyone who brought them a mating partner for Martha in 1899, but no one ever claimed this reward. The last confirmed sighting of a passenger pigeon in the wild was in 1900 when a young boy shot it with his BB gun. Martha is currently preserved at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. The extinction of these birds led to the public's increased interest in the conservation movement.

Important Dates

- March 14, 1876: The Ohio General Assembly makes it illegal to hunt wild pigeons on their nesting grounds.
- March 1900: The last confirmed sighting of a passenger pigeon in the wild. A boy from Pike County, Ohio killed the bird with his BB gun.
- September 1, 1914: Martha dies at the Cincinnati Zoo. The passenger pigeon is now extinct.
- September 1914: Martha is shipped to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History for preservation.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: passenger pigeon, wild pigeon, Martha, flock, nest, bird, extinct.
- Use specific date ranges when looking for articles about Martha or passenger pigeon in order to narrow your results.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Pigeons](#)" *Jeffersonian Republican* (Stroudsburg, PA), April 4, 1850, Image 2, col. 1.
- "[Pigeons Gone](#)" *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY), July 30, 1910, Image 5, col. 1-2.
- "[Lone Pigeon Left](#)" *Appeal* (Saint Paul, MN), January 14, 1911, Image 1, col. 6.
- "[Passing of the Passenger Pigeon](#)" *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), March 24, 1911, Image 6, col. 1-3.
- "[One Bird Survives Millions](#)" *El Paso Herald* (El Paso, TX), February 21, 1913, Image 6, col. 2-3.
- "[Martha, The Last Passenger Pigeon, Dead](#)" *New-York Tribune* (New York, NY), September 13, 1914, Image 6, col. 2-4.