

Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, eds.: Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations

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Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, eds, *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 256 pp., 7 b&w illus., \$30.00 Paperback, ISBN: 9780231178815

At a time of overwhelming species loss when we as scholars and humans struggle to come to terms with a sixth mass extinction that is either already underway or imminent, Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, and Matthew Chrulew, editors of *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*, offer a vital collection of essays that meditate on what it means to experience, resist, and narrate the “biocultural complexity” of extinction events (p. 2). Collectively, the essays encourage scholars to approach historical and contemporary extinction phenomena at the local level to tease out the intricacies of biological loss. Those lost are, both in life and death, members of and actors *in* local and global ecologies. As Cary Wolfe argues in the foreword, extinction “is *never* a generic event and *always* a multi-contextual phenomenon requiring multi-disciplinary modes of encounter and understanding” (p. viii). With contributions from philosophers, cultural studies scholars, and environmental humanists, *Extinction Studies* is an important interdisciplinary contribution to scholarship in science studies, animal studies, and the environmental humanities that addresses entanglements and ethical ways of being in a multispecies world. The collection productively skirts debates about language—Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Plantationocene—and instead tells situated stories about power, pain, and hope in more-than-human communities.

The featured authors have been in collaboration for years as members of the Extinction Studies Working Group, a community of humanities scholars based in institutions in Australia, North America, and Europe. Their conversations have yielded concepts that emerge throughout the collection, namely time, death, and generations, which the authors interrogate at various scales

both in historical and contemporary contexts. Half of the essays are scholarly tributes to species lost, ones that neither author nor reader could meet in this world (though the essays serve as an attempt at such communion). In these chapters, the authors consider what it means to encounter extinct animals out of time but *in place*. For instance, in Chapter 1, James Hatley visits Japanese forests to walk with Ōkami, the Honshu wolf last recorded alive in 1905. Through pilgrimage and poetry, Hatley experiences the emptiness of a place that has been without the wolf for over a century and attends to the human practices that bring its ghost back to these places. Thom van Dooren in Chapter 6 similarly walks in a Hawaiian forest filled with ghosts, specters of the crow called ‘alalā. Free-living ‘alalā died out early in the twenty-first century, but there is a functionally extant community of captive birds that may one day be reintroduced to Hawaiian forests. Van Dooren’s essay thus explores what this loss, even if temporary, means for those beings that remain in a place where native ways of life and settler colonial bureaucracies struggle against the other as custodians of a biologically and bioculturally diverse place. In Chapter 3, Rick de Vos concentrates on birds lost due to the depredations of European colonial expansion. He begins with Elliot’s Bird of Paradise, a native of New Guinea, and traces the violent history in which Europeans extracted such birds for display and dressmaking. The scaled-up slaughter generated by colonial desire resulted in loss of life and loss of data that would have made these birds scientifically valuable.

The rest of the scholarly contributions in this collection tell stories about species that are not yet lost but perhaps already gone, or grievously harmed in the process of recovery. These works chart the rhythms lived by species that are, as Deborah Bird Rose describes them, “at the edge of extinction,” as well as those of the people and other animals in their proximity (p. 119). In Chapter 2, Matthew Chrulew describes the work of saving golden lion tamarins, diminutive monkeys native to southeastern Brazil and endangered due to the clearing of their rainforest home and to hunting and trapping practices. He focuses on the captive-breeding and reintroduction programs begun in the 1970s. Though ultimately deemed a success and a model for international collaboration,

Chrulew interrogates what benefits and what suffers from these particular practices. The tamarin population has stabilized with the help of survival training, but many individuals died horribly in the process. In Chapter 4, Deborah Bird Rose attends to the communities and ethical practices that form around animals at the edge. She focuses on the volunteer workers who protect the monk seals that unpredictably haul out on the beaches of Hawai'i to sleep or to pup. She probes what factors motivate people to labor and come into conflict (with other humans) for the seals, particularly when the act of protection means enforcing a wide berth and eschewing contact with the creatures these humans care for. In Chapter 5, Michelle Bastian also thinks through distance in a methodologically inspiring piece that acts as a foil to the approaches taken by Hatley and van Dooren. Bastian relates a story about Leatherback sea turtles, timekeeping, and herself (having gone into her own records to determine her personal history in relation to the leatherbacks) to reconstruct an encounter that is out of place but *in time*, or as she puts it, quoting Rose, in the "multispecies knots of time" that link all life on this planet (p. 151). Bastian utilizes reflexivity and symmetrical analysis, both tenets of science studies, though her innovation is in weaving together these two approaches.

The editors announce the collection's limitations from the outset. This is not a holistic account of planetary biodiversity loss, but an attempt to narrate what it is to live with and in the wake of extinction. They feature animal species by design, issuing an invitation for future extinction studies that consider other endangered forms of life, like plants, fungi, and insects, as well as endangered cultural forms. Historians of the life sciences and others interested in accounting for the historical position of nonhumans will find inspiration in the creative narration of multispecies worlds displayed throughout this collection and in the ways the authors cite local and native knowledges in addition to governmental data and scientific reports. Moreover, the collection's view from the Global South and the Pacific contributes to an important trend in academic literature to de-center the United States and Europe, particularly as it is the Global South and small island chains

that will be most affected by the impacts of anthropogenic climate change. The messy, more-than-human communities that emerge in *Extinction Studies* enrich animal studies literature broadly. Additionally, the collection diversifies the historiography of the life sciences where the nonhuman has most often featured as scientific subject, like the model animals of laboratory studies, the pests determined to be disease vectors, and the livestock found to host antigenic material for inoculation. Ultimately, the contributors' diverse methods augment work in the history of biology that contextualizes species loss and contends with socially embedded classification practices, which determine when extant becomes extinct. Through on-the-ground stories of loss the collection evokes pathos, which complements more comprehensive histories of extinction that fail to convey its affective dimensions. For the animals featured in *Extinction Studies* are members of complex collectives and their loss—historical or anticipated—rends these worlds irreparably. As Vinciane Despret writes in the afterword (translated from French into English by Matthew Chrulew), “When a being is no more, the world narrows all of a sudden, and a part of reality collapses” (p. 220).

Alison Laurence

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Cambridge, MA

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