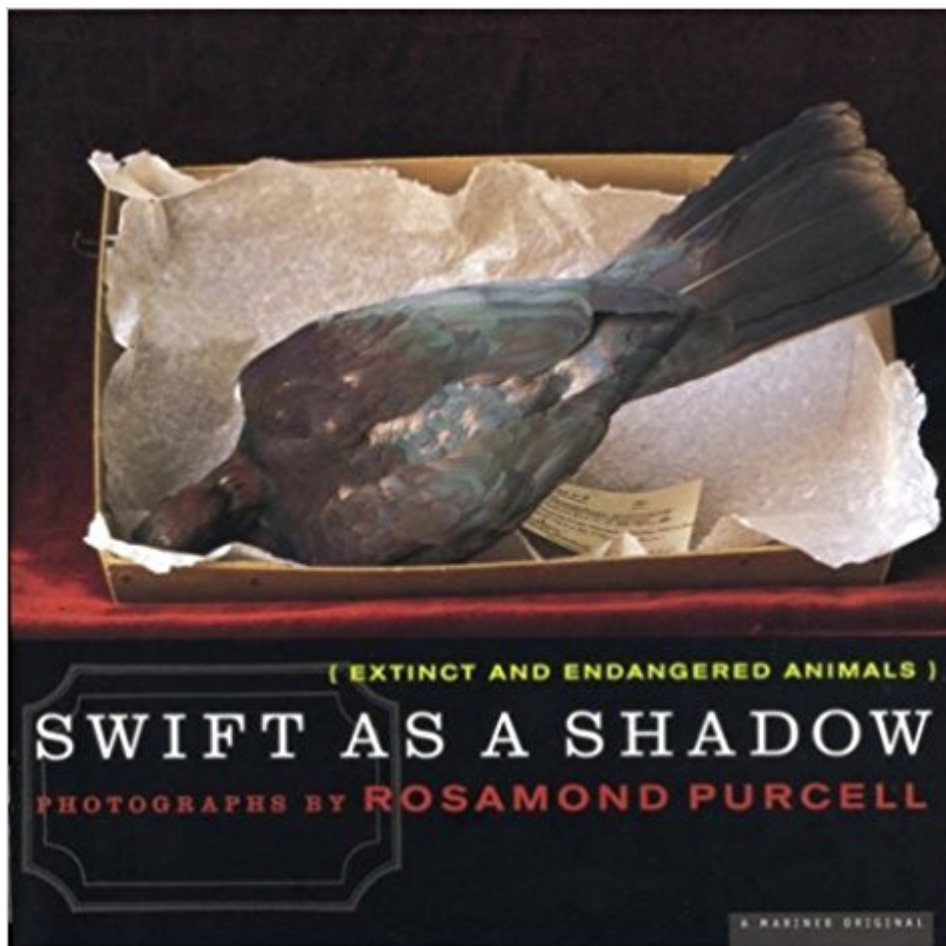


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# Swift As A Shadow



## Synopsis

"In the early nineteenth century there were so many passenger pigeons that the sky darkened when they flew overhead; it took three days for flocks to pass. They were killed by hunters or disappeared when their oak and beech habitats were destroyed. The last bird, named Martha (only the last of any species seems to merit a human name), died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1905." Here, in photographs and words, are stirring reminders of wild beauty that is no more, as well as profiles of species whose survival is in peril. Rosamond Purcell's seventy spectacular color photographs--taken primarily at the Natural History Museum in Leiden, Holland, which holds the world's most extensive collection of lost species--tell a haunting and foreboding tale.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"With the text by the staff of the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden, the Netherlands, *Swift as a Shadow: Extinction and Endangered Animals* provides a stunning record of disappeared and disappearing species. Rosamond Purcell's 105 striking, full-color photographs preserve the beauty of the passenger pigeon, great plains wolf, California condor, American bald eagle, Javan tiger, Sumatran hare, green sea turtle, bird wing butterfly and Japanese sea lion, among many others." (Publishers Weekly)"Purcell captures brilliantly the plumage of some creatures that will never take flight again--" (The Star Tribune)"Purcell, ever seeking oddness, turns her lens upon the Blue Antelope, the Pig-Footed Bandicoot, and other extinct and endangered animals preserved in the Natural History Museum of the Netherlands. Her photographs capture their haunting beauty and

intense, glassy-eyed stares. Museum curators provide brief histories of each species' demise." --  
[Editor's Choice] (The Village Voice)

Rosamond Purcell, the acclaimed author and photographer of the recently published *Special Cases* and *Swift As A Shadow*, has lent her unique photographs to books by Stephen Jay Gould and F. Gonzalez-Crussi. A regular contributor to *The Sciences*, her photographs have also appeared in *Ms.*, *Smithsonian*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harvard Magazine*, *Omni*, and many international publications. She lives in Massachusetts.

I'm afraid I was dissatisfied in the book. Either it was a lame attempt at an artsy style or there was a decision to try and keep costs down by limiting the number of photographs. In way too many cases the photographer seemed to be obsessed with dramatic lighting of extreme closeups. Although the photos were well done, in very few cases were there full body pictures. In other cases the head would be brightly lit while the rest of the body (of what there was included) would be in deep shadow. The most dissatisfying were the Cuban Macaw, and the Cape and Barbary Lions. The text, although well written, was also very sparse, and could have used some map diagrams to show population ranges. In short, there was a lot of empty space that could have been filled with photographs and information. The only reason I would recommend the book is that as far as I know it's the only one of its kind. I sincerely hope someday another book will be made with more descriptive text, and several photographs of various angles for a more "scientific" and comprehensive coverage. Those stuffed animals will not last forever and there is definitely a need for a well documented record.

This collection is hauntingly beautiful, artful, and thoughtful.

Each photograph of *Swift as a Shadow* greets the reader as a quick slap in the face. The range of 'grotesquely beautiful' images leaves the reader with a sense of helplessness when the initial awe of beauty turns to the realisation that in most cases the creatures displayed are gone forever. The multitude of animals, birds and even fish represented is an amazing array seldom found in one volume. Some animals represented are quagga, barbary lion, thylacine, javan tiger. The birds are an extensive collection (usually more than one example) representing most of the infamous and unfortunate extinctions of our time; Carolina Parakeets, Passenger Pigeons, Great Auk, Pink Headed Duck, Labrador Duck, Paradise Parrots (amazing!) Huia plus Dodo bones and Elephant

Bird eggs to name a few! Text is sparse, and given the stark, sometimes ghoulish photographic reality, this is not a detractor from the book's theme. All photographs are high gloss quality, if a little detail restricted by 'photographing for art's sake' eg; back neck view only of the quagga, skin pattern only of the Balinese Tiger. I'm sure that enthusiasts of endangered animals will now strongly consider a visit to the Natuurhistorisch Museum of Leiden, Netherlands, once in their lifetime.

Don't dismiss these photos as artsy studies. I felt that in each picture, the artist was attempting to restore some glimmer of these poor specimens' lost lives. In one case, though the specimen itself was so obviously dead, the shadow it cast strikingly suggested the living animal. Or in another case, a close-up of the animal's fur might help you better grasp the reality- this is not a stuffed doll, but a real animal that was once on this earth. And the accompanying text- by the museum curators- almost always included some small, moving detail of the animal's personality or physicality.

The Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum Naturalis of Leiden, Netherlands, exhibits a collection of extinct and near extinct animals. Photography on this part of the museum collection is done by Rosamond Purcell. Texts are written by Lars v.d. Hoek Ostende, Martien van Oijen, Rinus Hoogmoed, Ren   Dekker and Chris Smeenk. Editing was done by educational officer Lars. So the bibliographic reference best should read: Swift as a Shadow, ed. Hoek Ostende (Lars v.d.) Photography Rosamond (Wolff) Purcell. Being a museum employee I may not appear to be an objective reviewer but the collection is famous. Photography and text are fully worth buying it!

I heard about this book in a magazine before it came out, and I just had to own it. The combination of rare photographs and case studies on each animal were irresistible. Such animals would be forgotten without the artistic eye of Purcell and the efforts of naturalists to compile their stories. The photographs of the museum specimens are haunting, but with a clear purpose. It shows the importance of conserving the species we have left, so that we do not have to depend upon mishapen skins to remember them. I hope those who read this book recognize the human error in the past so that we cannot make the same mistakes in the future.

The photos in this book are not images you want to put in your child's nursery, but they tell the story of animal extinction better than any post-card shot could. This book highlights the finality of extinction as well as the importance of natural history museums.

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