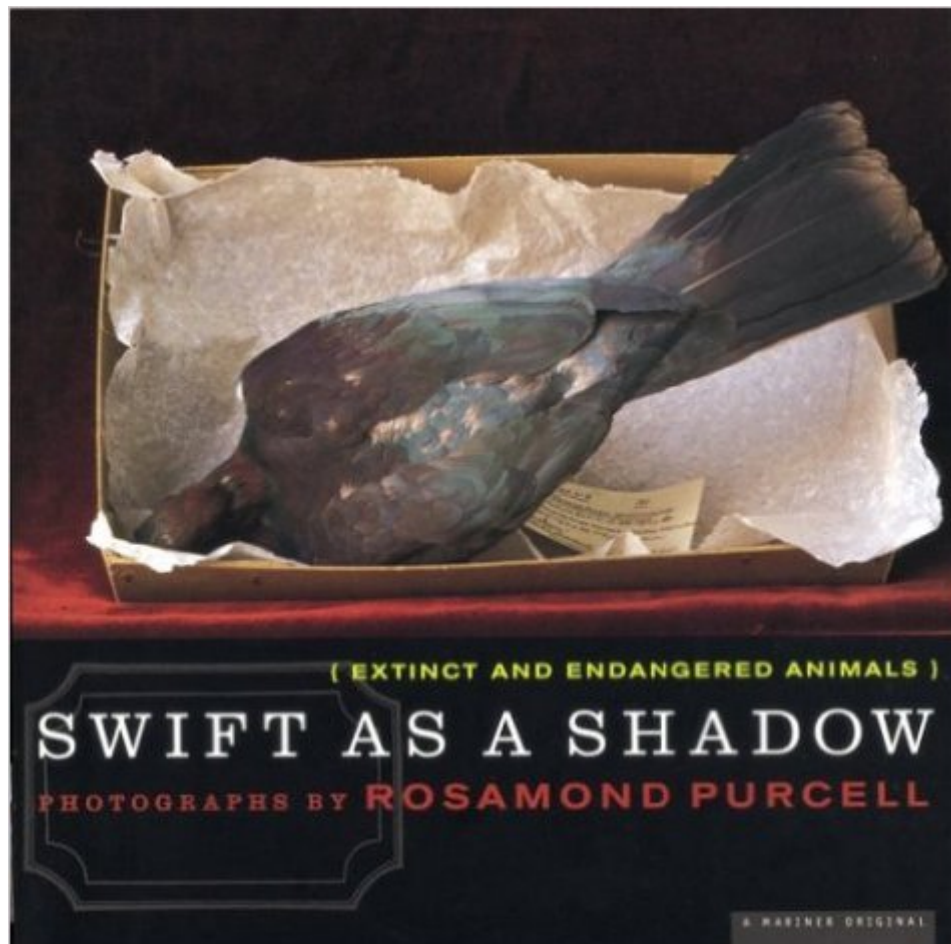


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# Swift As A Shadow



## 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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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

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, thiacine, 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.

I'm afraid I was disappointed 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 disappointing 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.

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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