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Band-tailed Pigeon: Wilderness Bird at Risk by Worth Mathewson

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BOOK REVIEW

Band-tailed Pigeon: Wilderness Bird at Risk.

2005. Worth Mathewson. Timber Press, Portland, OR. \$19.95 (\$27.95 in Canada), hardcover; 183 pages, 20 color photos by author, 19 line drawings by David Hagerbaumer. ISBN 0-88192-712-0.

This book is written by an avid and passionate pigeon hunter, but one whose passions are driven by conservation and a sportsman's ethic. Mathewson writes using homey and comfortable language. Thus, the book is an easy and fun read. The basic thesis, the treatment being divided about equally between the biology of the pigeon and hunting conservation, is that the apparent decline of pigeons beginning in the 1970s resulted, in part, from hunting and overutilization of the resource. He gives names of those who are irresponsible in the management of the species in Oregon, a style, I must confess, I actually like but have seldom used in my own writing.

For me the book got off to a bit of a questionable start. I wondered if Mathewson really knew the species when he used the scientific name *Patagioénas fasciata* for the Band-tailed Pigeon. As he pointed out on pages 20–21, this species was named by Thomas Say in 1823. However, Say used the name *Columba fasciata* in his description, a name in use starting at least with the 2nd edition of the *Check-list of North American Birds*, produced by the American Ornithologists' Union in 1895. That name, with the genus *Columba*, is still used as the official name for the species. *Patagioénas* was at times used as a subgenus name to separate the various clusters of *Columba* pigeons. But even then the Band-tailed Pigeon was placed in the subgenus *Choroénas*, not *Patagioénas*.

That small technicality aside, for me the most valuable parts of the book described the pigeon's important and fascinating trait of requiring sodium in its diet to digest foodstuffs.

Mathewson describes how this mineral is acquired by pigeons as they frequent various sodium-laden water springs. Unfortunately, flocking behavior at well-identified springs has been their downfall. These are the exact places where hunters congregate to shoot them. Mathewson points out that nearly half the pigeons shot at the beginning of hunting season are still feeding nestlings. Thus, the tally of pigeons killed during hunting season includes not just adults and nestlings shot but additional nestlings that die from loss of parents.

The final 2 chapters in the book, "Wild Pigeon Shooting" and "The Bandtail [*sic*] Question," are most informative as the author recounts the numbers of various pigeon species shot during hunting seasons not only in his part of the country but also in the Caribbean region and in South America. The toll is staggering. Some species are at high risk of serious population-stability problems because of this practice. The White-crowned Pigeon (*Columba leucocephala*) is one of those species. Mathewson's discussion speaks about the lack of an environmental ethic in much of humankind. No wonder—we are so busy learning how to use computers and electronic games that critical issues such as environmental conservation slip through the cracks.

I was also taken by the author's frequent mention of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), which happens to be my specialty. That added spice to the reading. While I thoroughly enjoyed the book, I am not sure I would have bought it for my personal library. However, it is a good purchase for the price, and public and school libraries should have it.

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