

MAN CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

NO SPECIES IS EXEMPT from extinction. If you don't believe that, consider the fascinating case of the passenger pigeon, perhaps the most abundant bird in America during the first half of the 19th century. Incredibly, less than 100 years later, it was gone forever.

The passenger pigeon once nested in vast colonies that typically encompassed many square miles. It wasn't unusual to see as many as 100 nests in a single tree, and roosts of several million birds were common. It was once estimated by Alexander Wilson, a naturalist who was touring the country in the early 1800s, that a flock he viewed in Kentucky stretched some 240 miles long and more than a mile wide. He calculated that the flock, which virtually blocked out the sun and the sky, contained more than 2.2 billion birds.

Despite these mind-boggling numbers, the passenger pigeon was unable to survive the onslaught of intensive market hunting and loss of eastern woodland habitat. It began in the 1840s and reached its zenith some 20-30 years later when market hunters followed the birds across

the country thanks to the advancement of the nation's telegraph and railroad systems. No adequate attempt was made to protect the birds until they had all but disappeared, but the species was actually a victim of its massive population base. Whenever laws were proposed for conserving the birds, the response was that they weren't necessary because of the vast numbers and distribution of the species.

Thus, the final chapter has been written about the passenger pigeon. It no longer exists anywhere, and it cannot be recalled. Even man, with all his inventiveness and creativity, can't erase that mistake.

Fortunately, it's not too late for species such as the peregrine falcon, the river otter, the greenback cutthroat trout and others that have benefited from successful recovery projects. Their future really rests with man and the decisions we make in future years. Recent actions indicate that man is starting to see the light, and you can do your part, too.

Colorado's nongame state income tax checkoff program allows residents to donate any amount they choose either as a contribution from their state tax refund or as a donation with their total state tax bill. The contribution is tax deductible the following year. Also in recent years, additional funding for nongame, threatened and endangered species conservation has been made available through "Great Outdoors Colorado" (GOCO) program, which utilizes state lottery revenues. Since the inception of these funding sources, the Division of Wildlife has been able to use the generous support of state taxpayers and lottery proceeds to help fund many of the recovery efforts you've read about in this publication. Although many species have already been helped, the possibilities are almost limitless if the funding is available.

Peregrine falcon



© BOB GRESS