

Jeff Karnicky. *Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 246 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-9498-1.

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Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America continues the rich analysis of human-wild bird interactions in North America.[1] Jeff Karnicky states that his is not a work of personal encounters, or memoirs on wild birds, or a study of extinct birds, though those have had great impact on his life and approach to wild birds. Instead, he sees his book as a way to examine major trends in human-bird relations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through human cultivation and government control.

Scarlet Experiment looks at specific wild birds, especially North American species, including the blue jay, European starling, red knot, Canada goose, black-crested titmouse, and tufted titmouse. Karnicky examines these species to illustrate major trends in human-wild bird interactions using literary accounts of morals and ethics placed on birds, birds as capital, birds as test subjects to understand their intellectual abilities, and birds as data points subject to government intervention. For each species, Karnicky establishes if human interference has increased or decreased the bird population. Critical to his understanding of these interactions is Michel Foucault's biopolitical power, which Karnicky applies to birds and the

Audubon's anthropomorphic association of morals.

Blue jays have actually thrived due to human presence in North America. With forests converted to farmlands and suburbs, the blue jay has adapted well to this changing environment. For Karnicky, blue jay intelligence and perceived emotions become a clear possible motivator for human interest. This interest increases when blue jay intelligence and emotions are compared to those of humans.

The European starling's introduction to Central Park in New York City in the late 1800s is another example of population expansion as a direct result of human intervention. The European starling was not native to North America. It was introduced by a group of citizens wanting the birds of William Shakespeare to populate this continent as well. The European starling has been a frequent pet and therefore contributed to ornithological biography, adding attempts to show the character, personality, and inner workings of these birds' minds. Karnicky points out the role of human intervention as the American government manages the European starling population through targeted culling, due to its classification as a "nuisance bird" to grain and sunflower crops.

Bird watching tourism on the eastern seaboard ties the success of red knot to discernible monetary value. Thus capital plays a possible role in the conservation of this species. Yet capital also has a role in the reason for the population decline: the large-scale harvesting of horseshoe crabs has led to a dramatic decrease in the number of their predator, the red knot. Birds are capital, but other things may have even more economic value.

Canada geese have experienced a population surge similar to that of the European starling, also at the hands of humans. After a population decline due to hunting at the beginning of the twentieth century, efforts to bring back Canada geese have led to a population that has grown in such large numbers that the goose is under government management and seen as a nuisance. While government efforts to trim the population continue, the practice preferred by American citizens is a non-lethal means of control. This costs more, but public moral concern for the geese overrules the economic concern.

Finally, the black-crested titmouse and tufted titmouse illustrate the link between species identification, population management, and technology. These two species have overlapping ranges and have produced a hybrid. After the species had been combined into one listing, DNA results led scientists to break them up into two species again. Also, with the advent of eBird, species can be mapped and tracked in new ways. Both scientists and the public participate in this mapping. In the case of these two birds, eBird gives viewers a precise guide to their real-time locations and where the populations overlap.

Karnicky's arguments rely strongly on secondary scholarship to provide an overview on issues involving wild birds in North America. This book is a good introduction to this vibrant literature as it shows change over time in American views of these specific species. It also serves as literary criticism, giving the reader a deep dive into literature on these popular North American wild

birds, providing insight into American understanding of the pervasiveness of wild birds in American culture.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Robin Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Spencer Schaffner, *Binocular Vision: The Politics of Representation in Birdwatching Field Guides* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); and Carolyn Merchant, *Spare the Birds! George Bird Grinnell and the First Audubon Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

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