

LEVELED BOOK • M

Endangered Birds



Written by Rachel Lawson

www.readinga-z.com

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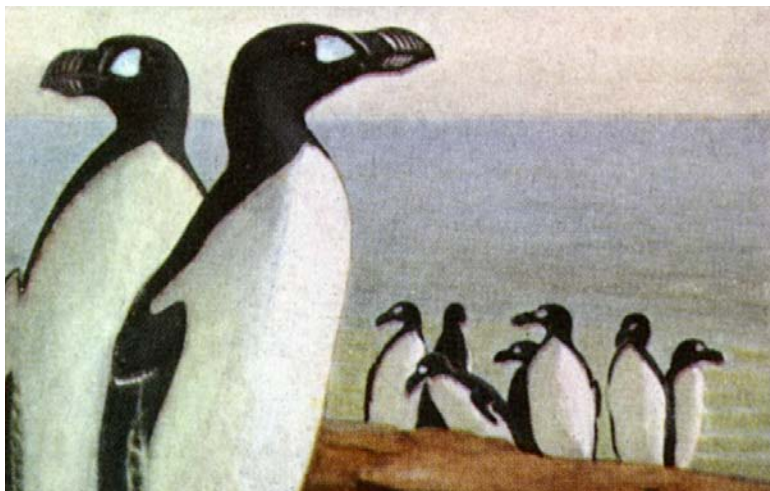


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Great auks

Introduction

Have you ever seen a great auk (AWK)? These penguin-like birds once lived along the coasts from Iceland to Florida. But the great auk was fiercely hunted for its feathers and eggs. The very last ones were killed in 1844. Today, great auks are **extinct**. You can only see them in pictures, or see their skeletons in a museum.

There are many other birds that are **endangered**, or close to becoming extinct. We will look at some of those birds in this book. We will also see some ways that humans are trying to save them.



People keep an eye on birds that are in danger of becoming extinct. Learning about the birds helps people help the birds.

The Kakapo

The kakapo (ka-ku-po) of New Zealand is one of the strangest, and rarest, birds in the world. It has short wings and cannot fly, but it has strong legs to walk through the mountains. It looks like an owl, and it comes out at night like an owl. But the kakapo is actually a parrot. Male kakapos make a booming call that sounds like a giant heartbeat.



A kakapo only uses its wings to glide from trees.



A pair of kakapos share food.

Before Europeans came to New Zealand, there were few **predators**, or meat-eating animals, on the islands. Europeans brought cats, rats, and dogs to New Zealand. The kakapos had never seen these animals, so they didn't know how to defend themselves. And they couldn't fly to escape. The predators killed so many birds that by the 1950s, the kakapo disappeared.

Then, in 1974, a few males were found. But because there were no females to lay eggs, kakapos would become extinct once the males died.

In 1980, four females were found. Humans moved the kakapos to small islands without predators. Scientists began **breeding** the kakapos, or helping them reproduce. Today, there are 62 kakapos.



Humans are trying to prevent kakapos from dying off by putting them in protected areas.



Short-tailed albatross

The Short-Tailed Albatross

There were once millions of short-tailed albatrosses. These beautiful gull-like birds spend many years at sea before nesting. All the short-tailed albatrosses nested on a few islands around Japan.



Albatrosses were often killed for their feathers, which were used for decoration.

About one hundred years ago, women loved to wear feathers in their hats. Hunters killed thousands of albatrosses for their feathers. Soon, there were none left on the islands. It seemed that the short-tailed albatross was extinct.

Years after the last albatross was seen, a few were spotted nesting on a volcanic island. These albatrosses had been at sea while the others were killed. They were the last short-tailed albatrosses alive.

Today, the albatrosses' island is protected. The birds are still in danger, though. The volcanic island might erupt, killing the last short-tailed albatrosses.



Albatrosses nesting on Tori-shima island



California condor in flight

The California Condor

The California condor is the largest flying bird in North America.

For many years, farmers, ranchers, and hunters shot and poisoned these birds.

Do You Know?

California condors often die of lead poisoning. A condor eats dead animals, some of which have been shot. The condor swallows the lead bullets with the meat. The condor's strong stomach absorbs the poisonous lead, making the condor sick.

In the 1980s, the last 27 living condors were caught. Now scientists take condor eggs and keep them warm until they hatch. Then, they hand-feed the chicks using condor puppets. The puppets help the chicks learn to live with



other condors, instead of with humans. Once the chicks can fly, they are released into the wild.



A scientist uses a condor puppet to feed a baby condor so it will learn from its own species and not rely on humans to survive.



Scientists put tags on California condors to help keep track of the birds.

The condors are still in danger after they are released. Some are shot. Others die by hitting power lines. Scientists still keep condors in zoos and raise chicks by hand. Someday all the condors may fly free.

Conclusion

There are many other endangered birds in the world. Most are dying out because of human activity.

But people are now trying to save these rare and beautiful animals from extinction.



These are the areas where the birds you learned about in this book can be found.

Glossary

breeding	helping something reproduce (p. 8)
endangered	in danger of dying out completely (p. 5)
extinct	died out completely; none left alive (p. 4)
predators	animals that hunt and eat other animals (p. 7)

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