

The Extinctuary

"It's always devastating when you witness a species' extinction, for what you are seeing is the dismantling of ecosystems and irreparable genetic loss."

—Tim Flannery *The Weather Makers* (118)

This proposal introduces a new blog in response to the seventh mass extinction. This blog will publish obituaries (500-1000 words in length) in honor of species that are threatened, near endangered, or extinct in an effort to raise awareness, inform, educate and entertain. Such an obituary would treat an entire species the way a typical obituary treats an individual. An extinctuary might include a biographical sketch, a discussion of major evolutionary accomplishments, a description of its niche, some reference to closest family (or genus) relations, who in particular will miss this species, and some accounting of what will be lost. It would be reasonable to expect the tone of such a genre to be a some mixture of dark, informative, and humorous. This blog is meant to help us remember these absences, these gaps in the fabric of various ecosystems, and account for the genetic libraries of Alexandria that are lost when an unbroken thread of thirty million years of continuous evolutionary experimentation is suddenly brought to an end. It is very difficult to see what is no longer there, and this blog would help illuminate what is absent.

In order to write these obituaries, we would circulate a call for papers among various different scientific publications and organizations to canvass the widest possible audience of biologists (i.e., ornithologists, herpetologists, entomologists, ichthyologists, botanists) and find those individual experts who focus on endangered species. Submission to the Extinctuary will be peer-reviewed, and we would offer editing advice to ensure each obituary is accurate, clear, engaging, and accessible. The blog might also publish other articles on the topic of extinction, such as my own writing on Stewart Brand's *Revive & Restore* (<http://reviverestore.org/>) project, in which Brand proposes the concept of de-extinction. It is also likely this blog would publish reviews of the latest ecocritical books, and serve more generally as a hub for all things related to extinction.

Ideal outcomes:

- The Extinctuary would raise awareness of animals that are not on the list of typical extinction rockstars (namely, the Dodo, the Woolly Mammoth, the Passenger Pigeon, or Steller's sea cow).
- The Extinctuary would raise awareness about the wide range of work and research biologists undertake.
- The Extinctuary might inspire young readers to careers in conservation.
- The Extinctuary would be a clear-cut example of collaboration between the humanities and the sciences, and allow biologists to reach audiences well beyond their niche communities.
- The Extinctuary could serve as a signpost to readers, pointing them in the way of organizations, institutions, charities, and even specific people or labs whom they might contact or donate to.
- The Extinctuary would be good press for HUCE and Harvard in general.

We would like to partner with the Harvard University Center for the Environment because we agree fully with its mission

"to provide the next generation of Harvard-educated researchers, policymakers and corporate leaders with a comprehensive interdisciplinary environmental education, while fostering linkages and partnerships amongst different parts of the University as well as between the University and the outside world."

HUCE is uniquely positioned to help us effectively reach out to a wide network of scientists. We would also hope to secure both webspace to host the website, and a fund to provide modest honoraria to those scientists and researchers who take the time out of their day to condense and translate their research into the five hundred word genre of an extinctuary. Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to working together with the Center soon.

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