

EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE WORLD

#7 THE CAROLINA PARROT

Conuropsis carolinensis



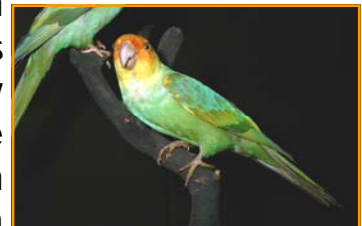
CAROLINA PARROTS
Hand-coloured aquatint/engraving
by John James Audubon 1833

The Carolina Parrot was the only parrot species native to the eastern United States. It was found from the Ohio Valley to the Gulf of Mexico, and lived in old forests along rivers. It was the only species at the time classified in the genus *Conuropsis*.

The last wild specimen was killed in Okeechobee County in Florida in 1904, and the last captive bird died at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918. This was the male specimen "Incas," who died within a year of his mate "Lady Jane." It was not until 1939, however, that it was determined that the Carolina Parrot had become extinct.

At some date between 1937 and 1955, three parrots resembling this species were sighted and filmed in the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia. However, after analysing the film, it was decided that the birds filmed were probably feral parrots. Additional reports of the bird were made in Okeechobee County in Florida until the late 1920s, but these were not supported by specimens.

The Carolina Parrot died out from a number of different threats. To make space for more agricultural land, large areas of forest were cut down, taking away its habitat. The colourful feathers were in demand as decorations on ladies' hats, and the birds were kept as pets. Even though the birds bred easily in captivity, little was done by owners to increase the population of captive birds. Finally, they were killed in large numbers because farmers considered them a pest, although many farmers valued them for controlling the invasive cocklebur.



Mounted Specimen
Museum Wiesbaden, Germany

Photo: Fritz Geller-Grimm

This combination of factors extirpated the species from most of its range until the early years of the 20th century. However, the last populations were not much hunted for food or feathers, nor did the farmers in rural Florida consider them a pest as the benefit of the birds' love of cocklebur clearly outweighed the minor damage they did to the small-scale garden plots. The final extinction of the species is somewhat of a mystery, but the most likely cause seems to be that the birds succumbed to poultry disease, as suggested by the rapid disappearance of the last, small, but apparently

healthy and reproducing flocks of these highly social birds. If this is true, the very fact that the Carolina Parrot was finally tolerated near human settlements proved its undoing.

About seven hundred and twenty skins and sixteen skeletons are housed in museums around the world, and of the forty-nine supposed egg specimens it is accepted that twenty are certainly, and seven are probably, correctly assigned to the species.

There was another parrot species, the Mexican Thick-billed Parrot, *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*, that also occurred in the United States. This bird's range extended to Arizona before its population declined in the 20th century. However, attempts to reintroduce the species in the 1980s met with little success.



Reference: Wikipedia—the free encyclopaedia
