

## Hannah Weiss

In 1857, members of a select committee of the Ohio Senate reviewed a petition for a bill to restrict hunting of the passenger pigeon, and decided, "The passenger pigeon needs no protection.... it is here today and elsewhere tomorrow, and no ordinary destruction can lessen them, or be missed from the myriads that are yearly produced." They were wrong. In 1914, the last known passenger pigeon died, and a once incredibly numerous species had been wiped out in a matter of decades, as a result of overharvesting and the destruction of its habitat.

Those who hunted the passenger pigeon and destroyed its habitat likely did not do so with the specific aim of causing the extinction of a species. Rather, they were guilty of greed, shortsighted thinking, and ignorance, the same qualities that today are leading humans into one environmental disaster after another. We are depleting the world's biodiversity without bothering to understand what the consequences might be. Ecosystems are complex, and a single alteration, such as the extinction of a species, can affect another species that might depend on it for food or for controlling the population of its predator. Sometimes it is not clear what effect a species has on an ecosystem until that species is gone.

Causing the extinction of species and the disruption of ecosystems does more than limit the amount of nature that our children will be able to enjoy. Earth's biodiversity provides a number of ecological services that we depend upon, and which we are currently in the process of reducing. For example, cutting down forests has the obvious benefit of providing us with raw materials. But the trade off is the loss of a number of services provided by forests, including support of the nutrient cycle, climate regulation, and erosion control. We also depend on the services of rivers, wetlands, and other systems that are also under threat. Additionally, our treatment of the planet may cause global safety issues. Unsustainable use of water is causing water shortages all over the world. Water is so important for our survival that in the future there may be wars over the planet's water supply and how it should be allocated among our growing population.

We know that the world we live in today will have to support our children as well, and their children after that. Yet we act as if it is all here for us, as if we inherited the world from our ancestors and we can treat it and use it with no thought of the future. It is our responsibility to rethink this mentality, and focus instead on living more sustainably and considering the long-term effects of our actions. We must remember that every problem that we solve, and every environmentally irresponsible practice that we end, is something that our children will not have to deal with later. We must do what we can to ensure that Earth is able to continue supporting life when we are no longer here.