

## Ghosts of Gone Birds: exhibition enlists artists to save endangered species

Ambitious multimedia art project will bring together works from high-profile musicians, writers and poets inspired by extinct birds

Mark Brown, arts correspondent  
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One of the works that will be shown in the Ghosts of Gone Birds exhibition: Six Skins And A Single Egg by Rebecca Jewell. Photograph: Rebecca Jewell/Ghosts of Gone Birds

They are all, alas, bleeding demised, passed on, no more, ceased to be, bereft of life and resting in peace. Like Monty Python's dead parrot, the great auk that author Margaret Atwood is knitting probably shuffled off his mortal coil, ran down the curtain and joined the choir invisible 150 years ago.

But the loss of species also including the Hawaiian crow and Jamaican red macaw may yet help currently endangered [birds](#), hope the organisers of an ambitious multimedia art project.

The project is called [Ghosts of Gone Birds](#) and is the brainchild of film-maker Ceri Levy and creative consultant Chris Aldhous. If all goes to plan, they will have persuaded more than 80 artists to submit work based on extinct birds for an exhibition to be held in November.

Levy, best known for his film *Bananaz* about the pop group Gorillaz, said he got into birds quite recently following a holiday on the Isles of Scilly with his wife. "We were barged out the way by about 30 birdwatchers all rushing to see a blackpoll warbler.

He got an idea of making a film on birdwatchers which then morphed in to the art project: "I became far more interested in what they were watching than watching them."

Levy gave all the artists - including musicians, writers and poets - a list of more than 200 extinct birds and they could then choose what they wanted to do. Jamie Hewlett from Gorillaz has a Hawaiian crow; Rob Ryan has the Stephen's Island wren; Holly Johnson went for liver birds, and Billy Childish the Reunion owl.

Other artists include Sir Peter Blake, who has collaged a dodo and listed all the extinct birds in black and endangered ones in red. "It is a great, moving piece - a roll call," said Levy.

Ralph Steadman ended up drawing 70 birds, many of which he invented - the needless smut, for example, which regrettably never existed.

Dafila Scott, daughter of the naturalist Sir Peter Scott, went for pink-headed ducks - her father's favourite bird - while Ben Newman went for a bird with one of the best names - the bishop's 'O 'O.

The exhibition will raise awareness and money for [BirdLife International's preventing extinctions programme](#) which has statistics showing that the rate of bird extinction is accelerating. In the last 30 years, 21 species have disappeared and 190 are currently classified as critically endangered.

Birdlife supporter Atwood - author of the Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake and the Blind Assassin - will speak at the exhibition as well as submitting a knitted great auk. She said: "To find so many creative people engaged with the subject of birds and the threat of extinction that faces so many of them today, is truly inspiring.

"This magnificent show will reconnect us to the natural world, teach us about our past, and fuel our interest in saving what we are losing daily." Marco Lambertini, chief executive of BirdLife International, said Ghosts of Gone Birds was a provocative way of reaching out to a new audience about the extinction crisis.

"In modern times, species are going extinct at least a thousand times the natural background rate. Many more are so threatened that they are on the verge of disappearing and urgent action is needed."

The exhibition will be at Rochelle school in London E2 from 2-23 November, but the organisers hope that it will grow in to an international touring show.

- This article was amended on 25 August 2011 to correct the spelling of Chris Aldhous's name.

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