

North Country Book News

Children's Book Review by Charles Sutton

Words, Languages, and Alphabets

Some of the darkest times in world history are when those in authority decide they must burn or ban books, shut down libraries; make conquered nations learn to speak the invader's language; and denigrate their cultures. In recent years an example of this is when the then Soviet Union made Russian the prime language in all its conquered satellites.

Exploring this theme in a fascinating way is a combined work of fiction and non-fiction entitled *One & Everything* by Sam Winston (\$19.99. Candlewick Press. www.candlewick.com). Inspired by the Endangered Alphabets project, aimed at preserving cultures by sharing their unique scripts, author-illustrator Sam Winston uses writing systems such as cuneiform and Tibetan, Egyptian hieroglyphs and ogham to illustrate this book

We are introduced to stories, folktales, and fairy tales of the world by a group of colored round objects. However, one of these rounded stories decides it is going to be the most important and the "one and only story" in the whole world by devouring all other stories.

It is here we are intrigued by author's unusual signature typographic artwork using evocative watercolors to create his story-eating entity or glob made from a mixture of countless letters. It grows bigger and bigger until the entity boasts "I am the only story."

However, in the One's belly a few letters get together, then words, then whispers, and finally they challenge the entity. Caught off guard the One explodes into every imaginable story it had consumed and we are back to normal!

In the non-fiction part of his book Winston relates how languages have been around thousands of years before alphabets which were first drawn in wood, mud, metal, and animal skins.

There are currently more than 7,000 languages in the world spoken by around 8 billion people. But half of the world speaks one of only 23 languages. The author says it is hard to keep track of all the languages as words change over time, some drift into other languages, some are no longer used. But languages are like people, they do not sit still.

The book includes examples of 50 exotic scripts, all written from right to left, and almost all could pass as some mysterious code.

The author presents ten of these unusual languages, how they came about and their status today. Included is a world map showing where these languages got their start, many serving to this day.

Phaistos Disc—This disc, which is covered in little symbolic drawings, was found on the Island of Crete and thought

to be 3,500 years old. It is an example of how writing has evolved with different peoples writing on stone, palm leaves, and even human skin.

Tibetan—Spoken where ever Tibetan people are found, not only in Tibet but in China, Southeast Asia and in western countries. The script can be seen on Buddhist flags, documents, and sacred items.

Egyptian Hieroglyphs—Created 5,000 years ago along the Nile River in Egypt, this language uses pictorial elements to express objects, ideas and sounds. For instance drawings of dogs, wolves and jackals are reminders of the soul's journey into the under-world.

Thaana—This is the language spoken in the Maldives, an island nation in the Indian Ocean south of India which harbors thousands of coral reefs. It has a tradition of fantastic sea creature and great ocean voyages.

Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics—This language was developed in the 1840s as a written system for the oral Ojibwa and Cress languages. It later became the language of the Inuit people and the basis for several other languages of the Northwest.

Sylheti—This language was 'pushed out' of its home in northeastern Bangladesh and replaced with Bengali. However, it still thrives in communities thousands of miles away including in the United Kingdom.

Cuneiform—One of the oldest forms of writing in the world and used as a basis for several Middle Eastern languages. Its pictographic symbols were engraved in clay and adapted using wedge-shaped

impressions to express complex ideas.

Ogham—This ancient Irish alphabet (invented 4th Century CE) were short messages carved on wood sticks. Traditionally Ogham was written vertically and reading an ogham was like climbing a tree, branch by branch.

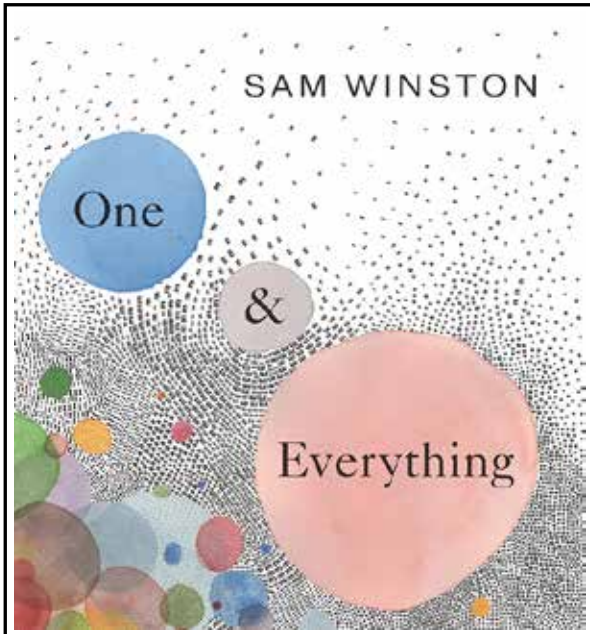
Adlam—This script used in Guinea and elsewhere in West Africa was invented by two brothers who were still in school in 1989 who decided their language needed its own alphabet. Their work is entitled "the alphabet that protects the people from vanishing."

Cherokee—A Cherokee named Sequoyah recognized the value of writing so he developed a modified syllabary for his people and within a few years the Cherokee were considered the most literate people in America.

The book ends with examples of how 50 of these lesser known alphabets look. Consider studying one of these lesser known and sometimes obsolete languages. Might be good on a resume.

Author-illustrator Sam Winston's practice is concerned with language not only as a carrier of messages but also as a visual form. Operating at the intersection of visual culture and literature he has exhibited his work in museums and galleries around the world. *Tate Britain*, the *British Library*, the *Library of Congress* in Washington, D.C and *J. Paul Getty Museum*, among others, hold his artist's books in their permanent collections. Projects involving drawings, and installations have taken place at institutes such as *The Victoria and Albert Museum*, the *Barbican Centre*, and *The Whitechapel Gallery*.

Sam Winston lives in London, England. For more information visit www.samwinston.com.



Children's Book Reviews by Charles Sutton

Board Books to Delight

Usually board books for children teach how to count one to 10 and identify various animals. Now some of these books feature themes like environmental issues and how people from different countries relate to one another – through their hopes, music and dreams.

In *We Share This Earth* by Dan Saks and illustrated by Brooke Smart, (\$8.99 Penguin. www.penguin.com/kids) one celebrates the power of community as "we plant and swim, dance and sing together."

The book has a thoughtful verse and message for these countries visited: Philippines, USA (Iowa and California), Tobago, Australia, Sweden, Columbia, Iceland, Ghana and Brazil.

Illustrated two page scenes highlight each culture. One we particularly liked were drummers in Ghana with their message – "Our world is intertwined like the ripples of our seas, the rhythms of our drums, and our many melodies."

In another scene we see a child in Tobago putting trash in a bin. This is matched with a boy swimming in Australia in clear, grass clear waters. And a final message "Without them there's no chocolate, no berries for a treat. Thank the pollinators the next time you eat."

Children are all too familiar with parents and others in authority making judgements and commands that must be

obeyed even if those controlling persons are wrong.

In *You Broke It!* by Lianna Finck (\$18.95. Penguin Workshop. www.penguinrandomhouse.com), *New Yorker* cartoonist Finck turns the tables on this behavior by showing how silly many of these demands are like the cover drawing showing a mother scolding a baby chick for cracking her eggshell open to be born. "You broke it!" she whines.

In simple line drawings Finck challenges the parents of diverse animals by showing how ridiculous some of

their demands can be. Some examples:

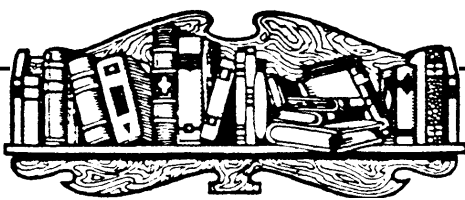
Command from mama cat to her child, "stop playing with your food" as cat joyfully plays with a mouse.

An octopus demands her baby "keep those hands to yourself." The baby sees nothing wrong, "I'm just being me" displaying hands full of treasures.

Then we also have a parent horse ordering her foal to "get the hair out of your eyes". Of course a horse is born with a mop of hair covering the head.

We also have a giant fish ordering a much smaller one to "Sit still!" Really? Why should I?

Artist Finck also entertains us with a snake, cattle, turtle, dog baying at the moon, alligator and hog.



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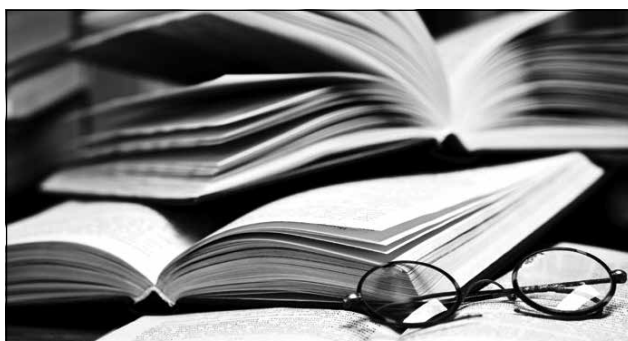
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Atlas of Extinct Animals

by Radek Maly and Illustrated by Jiri Grbavcic and Pavel Dvorsky
(\$24.99. Albatros. www.albatros.com. Printed in the Ukraine)

The disappearance of more and more species of wildlife is due to the disruptive results of global warming. But what sealed the final extinction of so many animals earlier was also the handiwork of humankind... which has been less than kind.

Humanity's role in the growing number of endangered species and the extinction of others covers a wide range of behaviors including using animals as a food source, sportsmen's targets, and even the demand for colorful feathers for women's hats.

The Carolina Parakeet

Hats? Yes. This Atlas describes cases where a bird's colorful feathers became its undoing. The Carolina Parakeet (last one died in Cincinnati Zoo in 1917) had a green trunk, a yellow head and red coloring around its head whose feathers became more precious and desired as its numbers died off. The bird also was killed by farmers who used its shiny feathers to scare off other birds.

The Huia

Another doomed bird was the remarkable Huia living on the North Island of New Zealand where the aboriginal Maori used its resplendent tail feathers to beautify themselves—as did the Europeans later on.

When the Duke of York (later to be Britain's King George V) visited, a guide put a Huia feather in his hat, immediately making them fashionable the western world. The last Huia died in 1907. In 2010 a single huia feather sold for \$8,000 (New Zealand dollars) making it the most expensive feather in history.

Passenger Pigeons

A disheartening extinction was the disappearance of the massive number passenger pigeons who inhabited the deciduous forests of North America. A flight of these pigeons was seen passing over Michigan for eight hours on April 8, 1873. They were overhunted for food and sent by the thousands by train for Eastern markets. Pigeon hunting was also a form of entertainment for sportsmen. One gunshot could bring down 12 birds.

The last passenger pigeon, a female called Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914. Their end was sealed by overhunting and deforestation.

Hunted to extinction

Wildlife had little or no protection during the 19th and 20th centuries and earlier because it was a source (sometimes of badly needed) food, especially aboard sailing vessels.

Hunting with no limits was a major factor in the demise of many of the 40 species covered in this book. Among them are:

Steller's Sea Cow—Literally eaten into extinction (1786) only 27 years after being discovered and found to be a welcome and easy obtainable source of meat rich in vitamins and easily harvested by seafarers in the North Pacific.

Heath Hen—This North American bird was hunted in great numbers by Native

Americans and later by settlers from Europe. The author speculates that the original centerpiece for Thanksgiving was not the turkey, but the heath hen. By 1830 it had died out on the mainland and just 300 survived on Martha's Vineyard for a few years. The demise of the heath hen became a wake-up call for conservationists. "Even so" author Radek Maly adds "their efforts have not always been a success."

Caribbean Monk Seal—Christopher Columbus initiated the slow and sad deletion of this remarkable 440-pound seal with the arrival of Europeans. Its only other enemies had been the shark.

Loss of habitat

Many of the book's now-extinct 41 animals also were done in by loss of habitat, predators and diseases brought in by other animals. (Think how often diseases came to America from other countries, for instance Japanese beetles and Dutch elm disease).

Loss of habitat was especially fatal to the tropical desert fish Tecopa Pupfish. Hard to believe but this tiny fish lived in cracks in rocks containing relatively cool 95 degree (F) water, but when a developer rechanneled area water for a proposed resort in California's Mojave Desert (40 miles from Death Valley), the fish's water went up to 107 degrees (F), enough to kill of all these "desert" fish in 1970.

Saving our diversity

The Atlas covers the extinction of many larger animals across the globe: Japanese and Falkland Island wolves, Zanzibar leopards, Chinese river dolphin, Atlas bear (North Africa), Galapagos tortoise, and The Achdari (a Middle Eastern wild ass).

The author hopes that the memory of species already gone whose stories are told here will be both our warning and our guide.

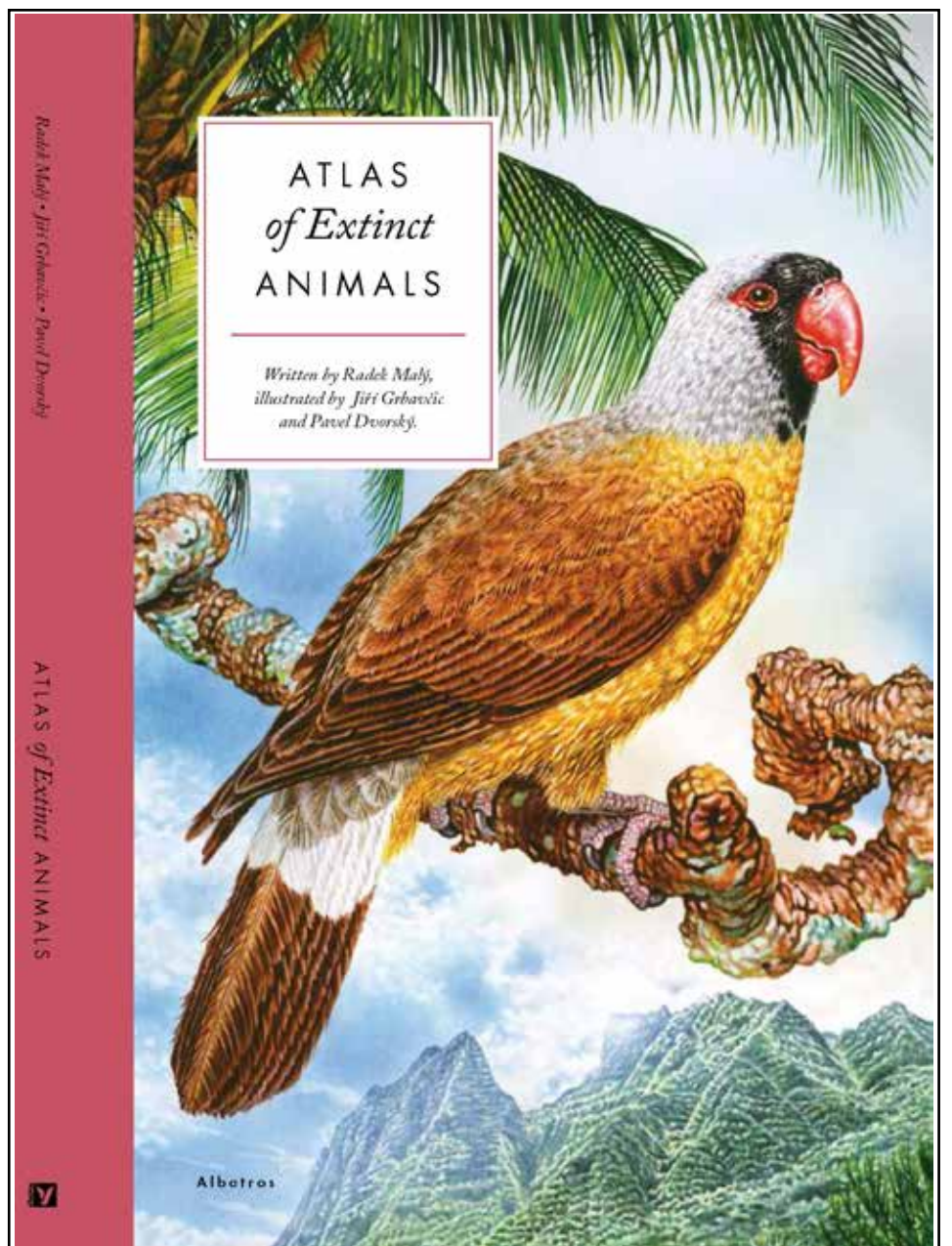
"If we behave towards nature responsibly and considerately, we can ward off (another) mass extinction in the history of our planet."

Author Radek Maly is a Czech writer, poet, translator and university teacher.

In the *Atlas of Extinct Animals*, the award-winning poet tells the stories of forty-one extinct species and studies the causes of their sad demise.

Of his works, his book for young adults, *Franz Kafka—A Man of His Time and Our Own* (2017) and his collection of poems for children, *Postman Wind* (2011) have achieved international success.

The large-format *Atlas of Extinct Animals* is supplemented with beautifully expressive full-page illustrations by gifted artist Jiří Grbavčíč and detailed pictures by renowned scientific illustrator and multitiered Czech artist Pavel Dvorský. Dvorský reconstructs the prehistoric world in collaboration with archaeologists.



Book News

Raising Happy, Healthy, Kind Kids in a Screen-Saturated World

New Science-Based Resource for Parents Struggling with Media and Technology

Dr. Michael Rich, known as the Mediatrixian, has spent over 30 years researching the effects of screens and media on children and teens and caring for young people struggling with media-related physical and mental health issues. As the founder of the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital and a father of four, he understands the confusion and concerns parents have about raising their kids surrounded by technology, but he knows it is possible to raise happy, smart, and kind kids who have healthy relationships with others and with media.

In *The Mediatrixian's Guide: A Joyful Approach to Raising Healthy, Smart,*

Kind Kids in a Screen-Saturated World, by Dr. Michael Rich co-written with Teresa Barker (\$29.95. *Harper Horizon*. www.harpercollins.com), Dr. Rich offers clinically tested, practical strategies for parents looking for

answers on how children's media use can affect their physical, mental, and social health. He reassures parents that they can successfully guide their kids through each developmental stage from infant to teen and young adult.

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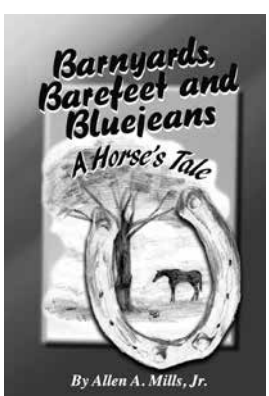
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