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## Book Reviews from *Nebraska Bird Review* (December 1991)

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### BOOK REVIEWS

John Terborgh. *Where Have All The Birds Gone?* Princeton: Princeton U P, 1989. 186 pp.  
+ bibliography + index.

John Terborgh's 1989 book *Where Have All the Birds Gone?* attempts to explore why the population of migratory birds in the United States has dropped so drastically during this past century and what can be done to better monitor and document possible causes of their disappearance. Over the course of his study, Terborgh covers three major areas of the United States. Beginning with the Chesapeake Bay area, he takes a close look at the declining populations of waterfowl; he then broadens his scope to the eastern United States to study song bird populations, and then finally narrows his scope once again to concentrate on the birds of the northern Midwest wetlands.

Over the course of the book, he examines extensively the available figures on bird populations and critiques the methodology used to gather the data. One of the greatest problems Terborgh sees during his investigation is the lack of reliable, long-term data on the disappearance of various species. He has a great deal of praise for the amateur birders in America, readily admitting that without the annual Christmas counts, breeding bird censuses, and breeding bird surveys there would be virtually no long-term information on most species of birds. Yet, he does find room for improving the rigor of these surveys, in order to more clearly document the loss of birds in many areas and attempt to assess more accurately and convincingly the demographics of their disappearance.

Although his discussion is somewhat technical at times, Terborgh's critique seems a much-needed compilation and review of the available scientific work on the populations of migratory birds in the United States. His analysis clearly indicates that several species are severely threatened in areas which previously supported fairly stable communities. His work is thorough in its attempt to explore the reasons behind these declines, reasons which are much complex than most people might think. The causes of these declines may ultimately be too complex to untangle, but

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through improvements in data collection, both by amateurs and professionals, research may be more readily used to convince the population at large and the legislators of the proper steps to help prevent the extinction of many more of these birds.

---Lysbeth Benkert, Department of English, Washington  
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The editor thanks Thomas Labedz for his use of this text so it could be reviewed here and brought to the attention of more NOU members.