

About the Cover

Cover Essay: John Gould and a Devil's Despair

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John Gould was a renowned British naturalist and taxidermist whose life spanned the 19th century. He produced over 3,000 color plates of animals and, in the mid-1800s, published his now famous three-volume work: *Mammals of Australia*. This beautiful tome, which is a much sought after rarity for antique book collectors, ironically depicted a number of equally rare wildlife species. Perhaps the most famous of these images is Gould's iconic rendering of the Thylacine—the now extinct “Tasmanian tiger.” It is almost as if Gould's great gift was to define our view of this species just before it attained fame through extinction.

The posed stance of Gould's famous Thylacine image and many others in the *Mammals of Australia* is derived largely from his skills as a taxidermist. At the age of 21 he set up his own taxidermy business in London and was listed in the London Directory for 1832-1834 as “a bird and beast stuffer.” Only in the following year was he listed as “a naturalist.” At 23, he became a taxidermist for the Zoological Society of London, where he achieved fame (and some fortune) by producing a fine stuffed specimen of the King's famous giraffe, a diplomatic gift from Egypt which survived only two years in the early Regent's Park Zoo. On April 15, 1830, The Times of London cited him as “The stuffer to the Zoological Society, Mr. Gould.” Indeed, Gould's fame as an artist is somewhat spurious, with many of his works painted by others whom he employed to build on his sketches, or by his wife, Elizabeth Coxon, who transferred and enhanced many of his sketches for lithographic reproduction. Nonetheless, Gould's taxidermist eye

seems to have won through on many of these images, seeing each animal as skin, skeleton, and sinew in often posed and artificial scenes. Sadly, Gould's choreographed creation is precisely how many of us will remember the Thylacine, rather than the awesome creatures captured all too briefly on film as the last remaining pair in Hobart Zoo.

By the same reckoning, what fate, we might ask, belies the Tasmanian devil, Gould's rendition of which is the subject of the current cover of *EcoHealth* and this thematic issue? The consensus published here is that without intervention by us, this fate may occur rapidly and finally—extinction by transmissible tumor—a brutal ending for such a wonderful species.

What would Gould have said about this? Maybe we can find metaphors in Gould's earlier life, when Gould the artist was Gould the gardener. He apprenticed at the age of 14 to the head gardener of Kew and worked in the gardens of Ripley Castle in Yorkshire until he turned to the more lucrative trade of taxidermy seven years later. Would Gould the gardener admire from a distance as the devil declines like the dodo and becomes known only via his painted image, a meticulous reflection by the Victorian taxidermist? Or would he opt for intervention? A gardener's usual wont is to control Nature, a proposal that is superficially anti-thetical to many, but one that has been carried out repeatedly in the name of conservation (e.g., eradication of island invasives). Should the modern-day Gouldian gardener pick up the tools of the Modern era and begin to prune? Here, our secateurs are the PCR machine and automatic sequencer helping us develop a tumor-specific vaccine. Or should the Gouldian gardener pick up the

scythe to systematically cull devils exhibiting even early clinical signs in a drastic attempt to preserve the species, as proposed by Hamish McCallum in this and earlier papers. Or should we transplant the hardiest seedlings, translocating young devils to form disease-free colonies that could form the basis for restocking of the Tasmanian mainland?

When we look at Gould's image of the Tasmanian devil on the cover of this issue we see an animal that is curiously lifeless: It stands right in front of us but does not seem to notice our presence, nor defend its patch with expected ferocity. The caricature of the devil, with its well-known capacity to growl and do battle for food, territory, and mates, ironically is the hypothesized reason the transmissible tumor spreads so rapidly. In contrast, Gould presents the devil as if somehow pathetic in the true sense of the word, with *pathos*. Look carefully at the devil's eyes, staring into middle dis-

tance—lifeless. It seems already on the wane, its right forepaw poised to move forward into decline and extinction. This Gouldian image is in reality the animal as “specimen,” staged and stuffed. *Is this the devil's fate, to become just another lifeless museum exhibit, arranged, like the Thylacine before it, in an artificially created habitat of ersatz foliage and rocks?* Or will we rise to the scientific, ethical, and moral challenge of large-scale intervention to halt its decline?

COVER ART

Ursine sarcophilus by John Gould has been reproduced on the cover from a plate in his *The Mammals of Australia* (3 volumes, 182 plates, 1845-1863) courtesy of the Australian Museum Research Library.