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From 'Field Guide' by ryan fitzpatrick

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My current project *Field Guide* is an attempt to explore notions of disappearance by zeroing in on extinction as a phenomenon. Each poem in the series takes as its subject an extinct plant or animal species, but rather than write *about* that species, I write *around* it, enacting a kind of textual ground where the figure has been erased. In practice, this requires me to first do a bit of research on the species – the IUCN Red List is a consistently good place to start. After I feel like I have read enough, I start improvising around the details of the species' life and death, folding those details into explorations of development and imperialism, of exploration and exploitation. The improvisations are meant to take the form of entries in a handbook for the identification of extinct species in the wild that purports to assist readers in their attempts to find these unfindable creatures.

Galapagos Giant Rat (*Megaoryzomys curloi*) When the lungs are beset by these feral cells, the body reacts, secreting its subfossil records. Remember, one must comb the woods with airborne toxins to detect each case of meningitis. One must plan, with due attention to each possible contingency, to describe the passion in one's own shit. There is no erasure for the rat. The rat shits in one's mouth during sleep. The rat stows away in the holds of ships and the colon of man. The rat cuts its own throat and soldiers on. One should paint the animal's salvation in the blood of the animal. A man's body is no temple for mess, but a cathedral cut from the finest purity. Any vision of the future must mimic the past, while any history must be clear. Simply, boats sailed over the ocean and, finding something, merely wiped it clean.

Golden Toad (*Incilius periglenes*) In the clouds, one must spit onto the ground until a lake appears. Water cycles to and from oceans, from one to the next. These pools glaze into enamel. One might clear the walls of a room to house them. One might bite into the skin. One might, on a certain kind of night, leave shirts open in the heat. Trees condense such that, over weeks, they drip into nests, into clutches. At certain altitudes, the sun is amplectant. At others, in retreat. Photographs paint mouths dry. They veil the sky leaving only the crown. They stand as a statue might, dazzling steep hillsides with jewels that accelerate water cycles. From out of each mouth is a slow trickle into the gills, a stream that is startlingly sane.

Candango Mouse (*Juscelinomys candango*) The ground is hard, but one must first dig. The hole must curlicue into populations, into entire regions. The heart of it aggregates, collects, divides into residential units. Acres split into towering averages, towering into an aesthetic mobility that houses less. One might contend with words pooling into these holes, hoses plunged down to pour concrete fountains. Dirt houses global flora around this pouring water and, despite the detailed rings left underneath, one should resist the impulse to sidle outward in dense movements facilitating a measured loss. In a stark compact, one might argue that the depth of the drift one leaves will force a cloud cover worth caring about. It is a foot set down that aches design. It is a pasture one pours in time.

Amsterdam Duck (*Anas marecula*) First, the skin must be wound back to the angles of the coastline, the bones left vagrant on the rocks. Then, a thin line must be cut from prey to prey. From these lines the maps one draws must find symmetry without an overhead view. From the legend, what wings from the shallows in narrow current, taxing the compared lengths to millimeters only to arrange names in a wider list? It is a net one casts from heaven. It is a degree one turns the hinge of a finger to wire one's spindling orbit around the feet. It is a pan one butters with mouth agape in established and certain oceanic pattern. The taste left in the air is the trace of its migration, the path that a bottle might wash from one's hand into a wilder language.

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