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Tagged and Tamed

by Chad Prevost

The great black wings of condors hover
in hot air pockets above the Colorado River,
isolated scavengers that rise and circle above their prey,

haven't stirred our hearts like eagles.
Not that it's helped the eagles, condensed as they are now
to Eagle Island, offshore Alaska, 30,000 of them,

nor has it helped the white-furred, polar seals
with the curious brown eyes,
poster-children for endangered species,

nor the thinned salmon swimming 1,000 miles upstream
on the Colorado, nor the spotted owls hooting
in the once-dark forests of the Northwest,

nor the big-horned moose in the Northeast,
driven down on the highways by the hundreds each year,
as they push their way further and further north.

Most birds can't help it; they still fly south
out of pure, dumb instinct, thousands of them to Big Bend—
wide open desert and mountain landscape

with the small colorful birds hidden in shrubs.
We tag and tame our twenty condors.
The only way to save them now,

the way we've reduced every wild thing we can get our hands on,
or wrap our arms around, the way our own lives are marked,
while the ghosts of bison still shudder on greasy grass.



There is no end to what we will call progress.
Anything the people are capable of, they will do.
The condors and their great black wings

are flying away, they who have been here 50 million years,
circling higher and higher, out of sight,
far above the omniscient, high-density sodium streetlights

that no one can see above, blotting out the unnecessary stars.
They are waving their slow, dark wings
but not to say goodbye. Circling as they do before a kill

to signal the others for a meal, now they gather to disappear.

