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Welcome **KenG** , Monday, March 21, 2005 8:14 CST (GMT-6), 1733 surfers currently online

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"What's Cooking on Renderosity" - KenG

Interview by Sandra Castie [SndCastie]



Saving A Species, One Render At A Time with [Ken Gilliland\(KenG\)](#)

[Part one of this two-part interview was first published in the March/April 2004 issue of The RIM]



Award-winning artist KenG (Ken Gilliland) is the creator of the popular "Songbird Remix" add-on packages for Poser. More than just a collection of models for use in Poser, "Songbird" is KenG's contribution to the nature conservation effort. From an early age, KenG demonstrated his unique artistic talents and has worked in several mediums.

Today some of

KenG's works can be seen in the Orlando Gallery, Tarzana, California and at his [website](#)

The new "Songbird Remix" package is a wonderful collection of threatened, endangered and extinct

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species. What initially inspired you to develop Remix? Tell us about the 'Akiopola'au model contained in Remix.

I think the idea of doing a threatened bird species package came to me when I was in the middle of my last ReMix package. I was shocked to find out that a third of the woodpecker species, I was working on, were threatened species.

Being a naturalist with a strong interest in birds, I decided that my next project would be something that addressed the plight of many of these birds on the brink. In my initial research, I found that many of the endangered birds were on the Big Island of Hawaii. It's believed many of them won't be around by the next decade.

I decided I had to see these birds before it was too late so I scheduled a trip to the Big Island last September and my vacation became a "working" one in search of these endangered birds.

I was lucky enough to get on a birding tour to a very restricted place called the Hakalau Forest Nature Preserve. Upon entry, we all had to wipe down our clothes and shoes so that no foreign plant seeds could be distributed. Invasive non-native plants are a problem there.

It was a magical place - most everything there was a "threatened" species. It holds one of the last remaining mature Koa forests on the island where the 'Akiopola'au, Hawaiian woodpecker, lives. The "Aki" actually is a highly evolved finch. Its lower bill is shorter than the top and this specialized beak then allows the bird to hammer and drill into the wood and then spear insects with the top portion of the beak.

It's endangered because its nesting sites, mature Koa trees, have been almost entirely cut down and it has no resistance to avian malaria from mosquito bites (mosquitoes were introduced by man coming to the island). There's around a thousand left in existence. After seeing this bird, I knew I had to do the "endangered" ReMix package.

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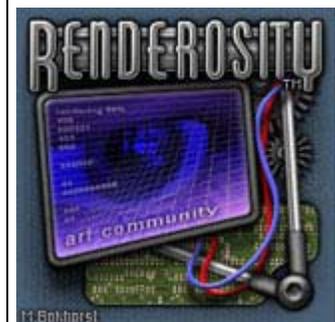
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What media/software did you use to create the model and how much time did it take? Is this typical for all of the models in the Songbird Remix package?

Well, B.L. Render, who did the majority of the morphs, used Lightwave to re-structure the bird, add the fluff feathers and replace the missing toe. She has done an amazing job with the ReMix morphs and has been very patient and accommodating with my morph requests.

The few morphs I've personally done are with Poser magnets, though I use 3DS Max and Cinema4D for modeling on props and my other projects. Modeling does not come easily for me, I'm much happier doing maps. For the texturing, I use Painter. I'm a huge fan - I think it's because I come from a traditional art background and the tools within Painter emulate the art tools with which I am familiar.

Some birds do take longer to create. The woodpecker package was a nightmare to texture because of all the patterning on the birds. The average ReMix map takes 2-3 hours to complete and, yes, I hand-draw them.

I have become a somewhat accomplished bird photographer but have found the photographs never translate too well to my Songbird Maps. I do use a digital camera for textures for some of the prop maps, like wood or stone.

How do you anticipate, or would you like to see, your series be used by artists in general?

I would hope the end-users, through use of the package, would help raise awareness about the plights of these birds and create some great art at the same time. I know from the few images I posted in Renderosity's Poser Animal gallery, I had a strong response, and feel I've already helped a little.

I plan to supplement the package with a PDF booklet that will give the story behind each of the birds and a closing chapter on simple ways of helping preserve these species for future generations to enjoy.

How has your work, especially the Remix, drawn attention to the plight of birds/how has your work helped conservationist/environmental groups promote the cause of protection of endangered species?

I think that the ReMix packages overall have created more interest in "Threatened, Endangered, Extinct" birds, and I certainly hope will raise the level to one of concern and protection. Unfortunately, many conservationist and environmental groups are unaware of the 3D art world. I hope, through this project, to change that. I know that my Songbird ReMix "Crow" has been used in examples for demonstrations to show courtship and flight behaviors on a bird oriented website.



["Akiapola'au at Hakalau" by KenG]

There must be some degree of satisfaction derived from knowing your package fills a need and from knowing it helps raise interest about conservation and environmental awareness.

There's always a huge amount of satisfaction in doing something that I think will make a difference, especially something so heart-felt. It's been tempting to do all showy birds like the "Aki" for the package, however, I purposely included some drab birds like the Least Bell's Vireo. I wanted to stress that the not too flashy ones are just as endangered. The "Extinct" birds I've created I think will have a strong impact.

I carefully chose three varied birds with different roads to extinction. The Passenger Pigeon was once the most populous bird on the planet and within 60 years it was hunted to extinction while the Carolina Parakeet was termed as a crop pest.

The Texas Henslow's Sparrow was encroached into extinction while the Federal Government Vs. Environmentalists argued for 10 years whether it was really endangered or not. I think whether you care about birds or not, that canary in the coalmine isn't singing very well and most of us aren't listening.

How has the work you've done affected your life, your family, friends, and/or community; how have things improved or changed?

The "Threatened" package fits easily into my everyday life. My wife and I, both volunteer at a non-profit [native plant nursery](#) as their webmasters and also teaching classes and educating people about the importance of planting plants that actually belong in their yards. Native plants also provide shelter, nesting materials, medicinal herbs for people, and food for birds and other creatures.

A few years ago, we purchased two small vacant lots next to our home to keep them from development and have now gardened them with over 300 California native plant species (with 15% of them on the threatened or endangered lists). Since we decided to "go native" our bird population in the yard doubled from 40 species to over 80 species.

In fact, we're known in the neighborhood as the "ones who bought the land for the birds." I like to think of it as my wife says, "We're healing the world, one garden at a time."

What impact has your work had on other artists?

Wow, that's a tough question. My work tends to be a bit eclectic; I'm doing birds one week, then historical the next, then portraits. That's probably the reason I'm not as well known as some artists.

I think if you were to categorize my work, what ties them together, is that almost every image tells a story and most of them have solid compositions. I have several artists say they have learned from my compositions and that means a lot to me.

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- *[Part two of this two-part interview will be posted next week - where Sandy will cover "What's Been Cooking - lately - with KenG"]*

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- We invite you to visit KenG's [Renderosity Gallery](#) and [Renderosity store front](#).
- Take a stroll though [KenG's website](#), where you will be delighted with gallery images of his current works, and those dating back to the early 1980's.

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- ["What's Cooking on Renderosity,"](#) with [Sandy Castle](#), is a regular Renderosity Front Page featured column.

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**Reader Submitted Opinions:**

By: [cryptojoe](#) on 2005-03-19

This is such a wonderful column and a great subject matter for me. As a conservationist and nature lover, I sincerely appreciate the works of KenG

By: **deemarie** on 2005-03-19

KenG, your work is amazing, and even more so, now that I have read the back-story behind your image creations! I can hardly wait to read next week's Part 2 of your interview, to learn about your current projects.

By: **Debbie M.** on 2005-03-19

Hi Ken! Nice to \*meet\* you. I've been a long time fan of your work, and appreciate you taking the time to talk to the community and share helpful information and tips with aspiring artists :) Looking forward to part2.

By: **albert8000** on 2005-03-20

That bird is truly one of the best rendered birds I've ever seen, can't wait for part two!

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### What's your opinion?

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