

EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

The theme of the current issue—"West of the Mississippi"—is a broad one, but it's intended almost as a burr under the saddle: the majority of our readership lives in cities east of the Mississippi River, and most of our articles come from our readership. We very much want to publish more articles on birds from that great expanse of the continent that lies west of the river—but in truth we still get few submissions from the West, especially the sparsely populated interior.

But when it rains, it pours. We set the theme of this issue two years ago, but in winter 2004, as we assembled our final roster of articles, we learned that there had been reports of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in eastern Arkansas—barely west of the Mississippi, but over an hour's drive west of Memphis and so a contender for this issue, at least if the researchers laboring to document this bird were to be so kind as to send us an article.

They have. We present here not quite what anyone had hoped for—that tear-worthy, frame-filling photograph of a proud

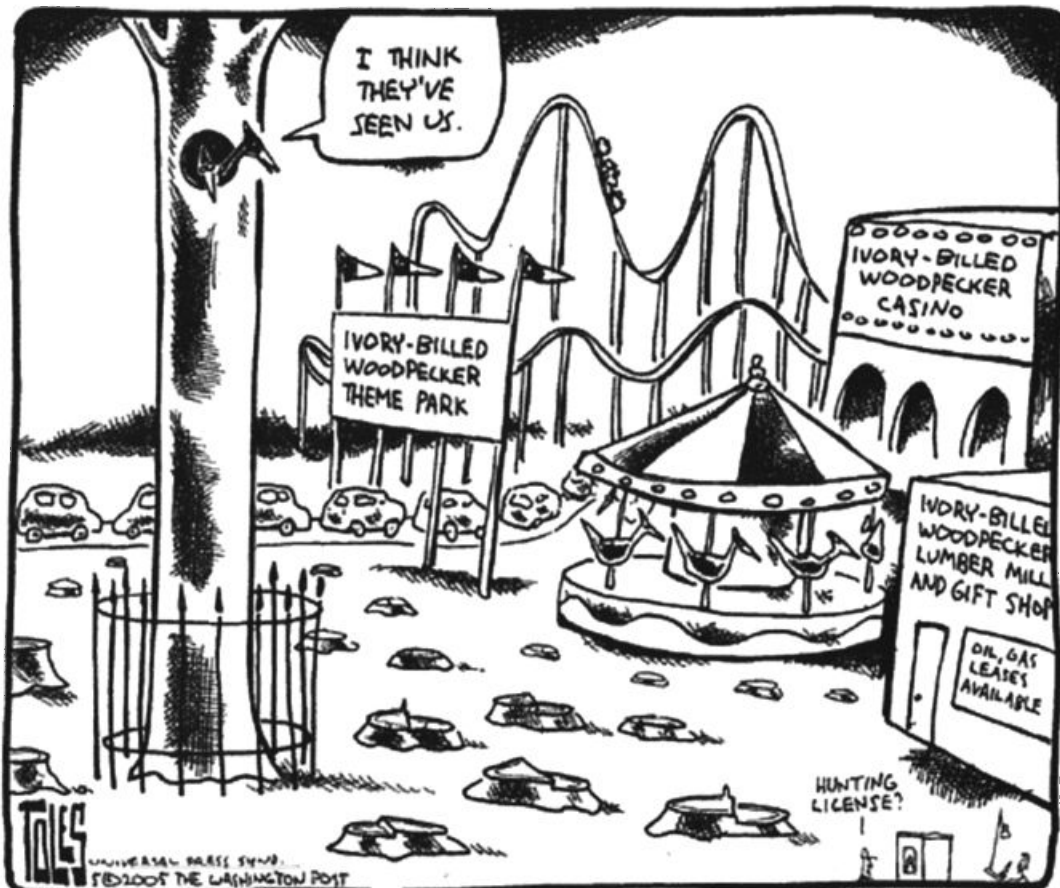
Campephilus principalis principalis at its nest cavity—but a nonetheless candid compendium and chronology of sight reports of Ivory-billed Woodpecker, reports that are not covered in such depth elsewhere. The Arkansas experience has been one in extreme frustration, surely: compelling reports by competent observers but as of our press time, no picture-perfect photographic evidence for the birders and naturalists of the world to revel and bask in. Moreover, this skittish bird (or these birds: no more than a single has been seen at a time) has been difficult even to get a long look at, as the field notes of the fortunate few indicate.

Do we overstep our mission in presenting such field notes—on a species whose very existence has been in real doubt for two generations? We have asked ourselves this question more than once. We have also asked ourselves the question in the negative: should the journal *decline* to publish sight records of rare, possibly extinct birds? In the present instance, because reliable, responsible people have advanced the case for the persistence of this species into the

twenty-first century, we have elected to provide them with space for publication of this extraordinary claim, partly in hopes that their reports will inspire birders to search for the species in places where it has been reported into the modern era—not just in eastern Arkansas, but in Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, too.

Happily, in the aftermath of the 28 April 2005 press conference announcing the Arkansas Ivory-billed, fears of several kinds have not been borne out. The scenario in which thousands of birders, among them rogues and rule-breakers, would descend on rural Arkansas, possibly frightening the bird(s), simply hasn't come to pass. The few birders who have made the pilgrimage to the Bayou de View have shown the utmost respect for the area and its inhabitants. Nor has the town of Brinkley, Arkansas become the circus-and-casino spectacle prognosticated by cartoonists and media pundits. Life goes on there much as before, though one can now get a "woodpecker haircut" and a special commemorative cheeseburger. A few government-approved tours are slated for the cooler months, for those curious to see this part of the world after the leaves and temperatures are down and the mosquitoes and cottonmouths have retired for the season. Despite some anxieties on all sides, then, it is safe to say that the birding community has conducted itself admirably thus far: no stampede, no outlaw birding. Just to be safe, the Cornell team offers a set of guidelines for ethical comportment at the end of that article.

For the present, as we wait for a breakthrough, some glimmer of insight into the secret life of this species, we must marvel at our own limitations: if indeed an Ivory-billed or two still hang on in the great bottomland swamps of the Mississippi Delta or elsewhere, we seem almost powerless to learn more



about its natural history, even to document one bird flawlessly. We will surely never find a needle in a haystack with only a handful of people looking for it: the threshold of detectability of a shy, possibly solitary bird seems vanishingly low. An army of eyes, trained eyes, would be needed to cover areas of promising-looking habitat thoroughly.

And so... we all might consider taking a trip to the southern swamps, just for a look around. If we ask ourselves honestly, as a birding community, "Have we done everything we could to follow up reports of this species, or to search tracts of optimal habitat that exist for it?"—we must surely answer that we have not. Perhaps because such habitats harbor few "specialty" species, almost no one birds in places that might harbor an Ivory-billed. And very, very few birders look specifically for the species. Their preferred habitats, though rich and beautiful, are admittedly difficult to bird, for a dozen reasons. But with modern technology—satellite photography, cell phones, GPS units, digital videocameras—it's far easier now to get into these habitats and to document sightings than it was a generation ago. As with any difficult search, whether for a missing person, a Mountain Lion in Appalachia, or a sunken pirate ship, there will be far fewer fresh trails than false leads. Will there be a heap of misidentified Pileated Woodpeckers reported as Ivory-billeds in years to come? There have been and will be. But our usual response to sight reports of truly rare birds—a shrug and a "show me a photo"—might need some modification at this point in history. We might need to take some sight records more seriously and follow up on them; what, after all, are the ethical implications of not taking any sight reports seriously?

Despite the stigma attached to searching for extinct species, at least in some circles, a few stalwart souls have continued to search for Ivory-billeds. Some were re-energized by the 2002 Zeiss-sponsored search of the Pearl River basin of Louisiana, following the report of two adults there on 1 April 1999. Two of the Arkansas search team, brothers Tim Spahr and Greg Spahr, who were also involved in the Pearl River acoustics study, were kind enough to send us notes on their (thus far fruitless but very interesting) searches for Ivory-billeds in western Florida, and we present these in the Special Section on the species, along with an intriguing short paper by David Shoch on the possibility of managing older forests for Ivory-billeds, no doubt to be a subject of much discussion at the federal and state levels in months to come. While the journal will not be in a habit of pursuing phantom birds wherever they appear, we are moved to present this material—which will seem Quixotic to some, heroic to others—in the faint but

palpable hope that one of our readers will take heart and go out and get that crisp photograph or videotape that causes our jaws to drop and our eyes to well up.

The other woodpeckers featured in this issue, the sapsuckers, are fortunately less camera-shy, but their identification is often anything but straightforward. The article by Robbins, Seibel, and Cicero treats a bird that was first identified as a male Red-naped Sapsucker on a Christmas Bird Count, then considered, after genetic analysis, to be a female Yellow-bellied. But correspondence with Canadian researchers working on hybrid zones in sapsuckers convinced the authors that the male parent of the bird must have been a Red-breasted Sapsucker—a hybrid combination rare anywhere, much less on the plains of Kansas! Mlodinow and Tweit's article on Baja California Sur's first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker furthers the conversation, making important points regarding sapsucker identification based on molt timing. We are always happy to get articles on difficult subjects such as this one, and on "stealth" vagrants generally, such as the Harlan's Hawk in Baja California Sur, also a first state record in a fairly well-birded region.

The balance of our articles in this issue treats not boreal breeders on the wintering grounds but northward movements of Aplomado Falcon and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush. Meyer and Williams carefully document both the historical and the current status of the falcon in New Mexico, a species (at least in our youth!) thought to be so rare in the United States as to be nearly mythical. In the 1970s, birders considered the task of finding an Aplomado Falcon in the wilds of West Texas or New Mexico to border on the impossible, requiring many thousands of hours of searching in extreme heat, mostly in remote areas. Even if one could be found, people wondered, would it stay around to be seen? Then, beginning in the early 1990s, a steady increase in sight records led to photographic documentation and, ultimately, the discovery of several nests in the twenty-first century—a reoccupation of their U.S. range, at long last! It's clear that intense searching was required, but a team of hardworking folks pulled it off. We're very pleased to present their summary here. For fans of Texas birding, Lockwood and Bates deliver the details on that state's (and the United States') first Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, a long-staying, singing male that appeared to need only a female to arrange a range expansion in that species! And we thank our many contributors of photographs for the Photo Salon: Mexico Comes To Texas, as well as the Salon on the invasion of northern owls in the winter season. Enjoy!

—Edward S. Brinkley
—Matthew F. Sharp

STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED IN THE REGIONAL REPORTS

*	specimen collected
+	bird(s) seen through end of period
†	written details on file
A.F.B.	Air Force Base
acc.	accepted by records committee
A.R.C.	Avian Records Committee
b.	banded
B.B.S.	Breeding Bird Survey
B.O.	Bird Observatory
B.R.C.	Bird Records Committee
C.A.	Conservation Area
C.B.C.	Christmas Bird Count
C.P.	County Park
cm	centimeter(s)
Cr.	Creek
Ft.	Fort
G.C.	Golf Course
G.P.	Game Preserve
Hwy.	Highway
I. (Is.)	Island(s), Isle(s)
imm. (imms.)	immature(s)
Jct.	Junction
juv. (juvs.)	juvenile (plumage); juvenile(s)
km	kilometer(s)
L.	Lake
mm	millimeter(s)
m.ob.	many (or multiple) observers
Mt. (Mts.)	Mount/Mountain (Mountains)
N.A.	Nature Area, Natural Area
N.F.	National Forest
N.M.	National Monument
N.P.	National Park
N.S.	National Seashore
N.W.R.	National Wildlife Refuge
p.a.	pending acceptance
P.P.	Provincial Park
Pen.	Peninsula
ph.	photographed (by + initials)
Pt.	Point (not Port)
R.	River
R.A.	Recreation(al) Area
R.B.A.	Rare Bird Alert
R.P.	Regional Park
R.S.	Regional Shoreline
Res.	Reservoir
Rte.	Route
S.B.	State Beach
S.F.	State Forest
S.G.A.	State Game Area
S.P.	State Park
S.R.A.	State Recreation Area
S.R.	State Reserve
S.W.A.	State Wildlife Area
S.T.P.	Sewage Treatment Plant/Pond
subad. (subads.)	subadult(s)
Twp.	Township
v.r.	voice recording (by + initials)
vt.	videotape (by + initials)
W.A.	Wildlife Area
W.M.A.	Wildlife Management Area
W.T.P.	(Waste)water Treatment Plant/Pond