

# An Ivory-billed Update



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In the December issue of *Birding*, we reported on the two-person team recruited to begin searching for Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana. That team has been expanded to six persons, scheduled to begin searching the vast bottomland woods of the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in Louisiana on 17 January.

Funding for the search is being provided by Carl Zeiss Sports Optics, a division of Carl Zeiss Optical, Inc. Six adventurers signed on after Zeiss upped its original offer of \$4,000 to \$10,000.

The team plans to stay on the job for 30 good-weather days, if possible.

Team members are:

**Richard L. Knight**, one of Tennessee's most active and experienced birders, author of *The Birds of Northeast Tennessee* (1994).

**Martjan Lammertink and Utami Setiorini-Lammertink**, who over the past several years have studied woodpeckers in Indonesia, mainly on Borneo. They have experience surveying for woodpeckers that occur in low densities in tropical swamps, mangroves, and lowland forests. Earlier, Martjan made extensive searches for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Cuba and for the Imperial Woodpecker in Mexico.

**David Luneau** (Professor of Electronics and Computers, University of Arkansas at Little Rock), who already has spent extensive time searching the area. He will be deploying electronic recording devices to detect woodpeckers.

**Peter McBride**, a habitat biologist who did his thesis research on the Magellanic Woodpecker (*Campephilus magellanicus*), and has extensive field research experience in several areas of North America and South America.

**Alan Wormington**, an experienced birder who is a former member of the American Birding Association Checklist Committee and the editorial board of *North American Birds*.

Team members will carry video cameras for documentation, if and when needed. At some point they will be joined by writer Jonathan Rosen, who last year wrote for *The New Yorker* on recent Ivory-billed reports. A documentary film maker from New York also will spend time with the team. He plans to examine the continuing pull of this bird on our imaginations.

There also is an Ivory-billed Woodpecker Search Planning Team. Its members are Dr. J. V. (Van) Remsen, professor of biological sciences at Louisiana State University and curator of birds at its Museum of Natural Science, the six searchers, two representatives from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (Steve Shively and Nancy Higginbotham), David Kulivan (of the original sighting), Dr. Vernon Wright (LSU School Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries; statistician and veteran of recent Pearl River searches), Dr. Keith Ouchley (Louisiana Nature Conservancy), Alison R. Styring (LSU Department of Biological Sciences and Museum of Natural Science; doctoral student using woodpecker census techniques in her dissertation); and Dr. Jerome A. Jackson (Florida Gulf Coast University; perhaps the world's leading authority on the history and biology of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker).

So, what happens if the searchers find a bird?

"Let's hope we have this problem to face," said Dr. Remsen. "We have established an official protocol to be used if someone sees and tapes a bird," he said. "There is a chain of steps with

respect to who gets notified.

The missing part of the plan is the really important one, namely what the State of Louisiana and federal agencies do with respect to public access to the area. They're working on a plan to regulate access. One thing for sure is that we won't be keeping any discovery a secret, only perhaps the precise location within the Pearl River WMA.

"We recognize that keeping a secret would be impossible, and pointless, in my opinion," he said.

The location itself lessens the problem of any site being overrun with people who want to see a bird brought back from the dead. "Navy Seals train in the Pearl River area; it's vast and intimidating," Dr. Remsen said. "That would limit any birder avalanche primarily to the area's perimeter. However, what actually happens in terms of access is in the hands of government agencies."

Dr. Remsen said that his hopes that the search for a bird most people consider extinct are "up slightly after looking at the impressive satellite imagery from the area and seeing yet another report from several years ago, with some credibility, suspiciously close to the location of the Kulivan sighting."

**Final Note:** December's article referred to the seminal study of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in the 1930s by Dr. James J. Tanner. It may have been my own name which prompted a name error there. His correct name was James T. Tanner, not James J. Tanner.

— James J. Williams  
Associate Editor, *Birding*