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Ivorybill Hunters: The Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness

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degrade native habitats makes conservation a laborious process (see Chapter 11).

In the reviewers' opinion, the book is biased and incomplete, and the accuracy of the account is compromised by the author's determination to choose sides, while placing himself above the fray. This book will be a tremendous disappointment not only to the majority of the real players in this tragedy but also to those who read Walters's first book, *A Shadow and a Song*—a carefully researched account of the extinction of the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, written with passion and deep regret at the passing of a unique form of life.

Finally, we were disappointed that Walters failed to report any recent information regarding the status of the 'Alalā. As of 2003, the Hawaiian Crow population was comprised of 40 individuals. The program has been expanding since, and the population has continued to slowly grow to the current (2007) size of 57. State, federal, and private landowners in a newly formed watershed partnership on the island of Hawai'i, are committed to habitat protection, threat management, and restoration at multiple sites and have agreed to continue to work to develop additional land management plans that will contribute to 'Alalā recovery. While the fate of the 'Alalā is still precarious, and much work remains, the likelihood of eventual recovery is higher than it has been in many years.

Sadly, unless there are many changes in Hawai'i, we predict that there will soon be more books chronicling the extinction of Hawaiian birds.—SHEILA CONANT, Department of Zoology, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2538 McCarthy Mall, Honolulu, HI 96822. E-mail: conant@hawaii.edu and DAVID LEONARD, 2574 Klebahn Place, Honolulu, HI 96817.

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Ivorybill Hunters: The Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness.—Geoffrey E. Hill. 2007. Oxford University Press, New York. 260 pp., 60+ black-and-white photographs, sketches, and 6 maps. ISBN 978-0-19-532346-7 $24.95 (cloth).

The Choctawhatchee River originates in Barbour County, Alabama and flows 170 miles southward through the central panhandle of Florida to the Gulf of Mexico. James T. Tanner never mentions the river in his thesis survey of potential southeastern river valleys for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis*. The indefatigable A. T. Wayne collected no Ivory-billed specimens along its shores, and no other ivory bill specimens are definitively known to have been collected there. The river was not mentioned by anyone in recent years as a potential hotspot for searches for this icon of American birds. Most ivory-bill searchers likely never gave the river a second look, even after glancing at its cypress-lined banks from the Interstate 10 bridge, speedily intent on getting to better-known swamps such as the Apalachicola or Atchafalaya.

The book begins as Geoff Hill, professor of biology at Alabama's Auburn University, follows up on a 10-year-old telephone call from a south Alabama hunter reporting a sighting along the Pea River, and recent local newspaper accounts of an oral history of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers along the Choctawhatchee River. With little more than some disappointment from a short inspection trip on the Alabama side of the river and some suggestive memories of extensive forest cover from perused aerial photos of the Florida side, Hill gathers together a couple of students and kayaks, crosses the Alabama border, and enters the world of the mature bottomland forest. Tantalizing kent calls, flashes of white, and double-knocks provide fodder for a return visit, and a major documentation effort for ivory bills ensues.

Hill has succeeded in writing a very readable account of the continued search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and an interesting natural history of one of the South's unknown places. In doing so, he has managed to stir the pot of Ivory-billed controversy once again. The doubters will decry his evidence and lack of the definitive photo, and mention Sasquatch and the Loch Ness Monster in the same sentence. But those creatures have never been proven to exist, and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker was very much a real species, historically widely distributed through the Florida Panhandle. Hill purports to be hot on the trail, with auditory and foraging evidence, brief sightings by multiple observers, and suggestive roost holes.

Hill presents the Choctawhatchee as no ordinary river, but a waterway lined with local stands of magnificent cypress and water-loving spruce pine, and consisting of a complex riparian labyrinth of oxbows, chutes, main channel, and mature flooded forests replete with favored ivory-bill food trees like oaks and tupelo. Little visited by birders or other natural historians, the watershed is protected in large part by a water management district and its own remoteness. People visiting Morrison Spring, a major tributary to the main river, know that they have come upon a special place where it is not hard to imagine ivory bills flying through the canopy and the ghosts of native paroquets screeching at dawn.

Except for the initial months of the search, there is no attempt at secrecy, and the book follows the accounts of the searchers from month to month as they attempt documentation of this rarest of birds. The reader cannot but be impressed by the openness of Hill's account, presenting the details as they happened with an abundance of habitat information and recommending areas along the river for readers to search for themselves. He makes no attempt to sugarcoat some of his and his rookie crew's documentation failures. The crew's photographic failures would be laughable if it weren't for the recent history of other alleged encounters with this species that have produced a potpourri of blurry photos, half-second glimpses, suggestive videos, and birds and even squirrels disappearing behind trees. This crew seemed to excel at photographic failure to the point where this exasperated reader wanted to scream for just one accomplished professional wildlife photographer to come kayaking to the rescue. Hill, though, is fair in extolling praises for his students who live in a remote field camp and maintain a rigorous schedule of exhausting kayak searches from dawn to dusk, day after day, week after week.

A considerable part of the book is spent on discussing the controversy of the Arkansas sightings. There is some gentle chiding of some aspects of the Cornell University approach, but Hill is strong in his support for their efforts and the efforts of searchers in other states. He is firm in his belief that other folks, including his own students, are definitely seeing and hearing something out there, something that is not just oddly plumaged

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Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*). The detected birds are described as flying like loons; they are fast, agile, and incredibly wary. If there is one red flag that stands out in all the searches including Hill's, it is that the birds are almost never seen perched, and they are seldom seen by more than one observer at a time.

If and when the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is sufficiently documented by physical evidence, Hill's bark adhesion measuring device and his detailed descriptions and photographs of potential Ivory-billed foraging evidence, including bark peeling, bark stripping, and chiseling, should prove quite valuable. I did find some of his evidence a bit underwhelming. The photo of a cavity-ridden old cypress on p.148 looks suspiciously like aged knotholes from old fallen branches rather than woodpecker-excavated holes. Hill's contention that only woodpeckers can excavate large cavities in living trees is probably true, but certainly there are animals out there that can enlarge cavities, including all of the woodpeckers, raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), various tree squirrels, and insects, plus various fungi and wood rot.

The evidence collected is suggestive, and the sightings plausible but exasperatingly short. Both students and professor had hoped for much more. Still one must remember that no one is an expert at finding ivory bills, despite claims to the contrary. Tanner was taken to his Tensas River birds, and his one-day August search and subsequent write-off of the steamy Pearl River belie any thorough survey of a southern river system. Read the now six books on the subject, do some bottomland kayaking and bayou wading, dodge a few hazards, and your knowledge base can be as good as the next person's. If the bird still exists, maybe it will be the deer hunter or angler with a camera who finally captures ornithology's most wanted portrait, not phalanxes of birders and kayakers tromping and paddling through the bottomlands and scaring the woodpeckers to the next county.

Hill notes that virtually no remote swamp in the Florida panhandle has been legitimately searched for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers since collectors stored their shotguns 100 years ago. Until these swamps and those great river swamps in the Carolinas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and elsewhere are thoroughly searched by repeated visits of competent observers in the narrow window of opportunity that these difficult ecosystems present, any final chapter on this species shall be left unwritten.

Perhaps it is the collective guilt of losing the most abundant bird ever to grace the North American skies, the Passenger Pigeon, *Ectopistes migatorius*, which engenders among ivory-bill searchers a reluctance to accept the possible fate of another magnificent bird that steeply declined at about the same time that the pigeon population winked out. Perhaps there's an incentive to make things right for the species this time around. No doubt, too, it is partially the rich cultural heritage of a bird storied in tales and art, from Audubon's superb portrait and the hotel room–destroying capers of Wilson's captive young bird to the early photographs and James Tanner's intimate natural history of a single family of Louisiana ivory bills for his doctoral dissertation. I clearly remember the words of the late Maryland ornithologist Rick Blom, terminally ill in a Pearl River, Louisiana motel room, and able to search the forests for only an hour or two a day, saying that any birder worth his salt *had* to participate in this search, for no ornithological quest on the North American continent could be more fulfilling.

Perhaps the 21st century Ivory-billed Woodpecker is only the bird woman Rima from William H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*, calling one to adventure and self-assessment in the green canopies of the mystical bottomland forests. If conservation gains and natural history knowledge result from these investigations, even if no Ivory-billed Woodpecker is ever photographed, the efforts will not be in vain. The cypress-dwelling Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*, golden swamp warbler, wintering Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*, and snake with the white mouth will still have a home.

Followers of the ongoing ivory-bill saga will turn each page and follow each kayak stroke in great anticipation of learning clues to the natural history of this enigmatic species, while nonbelievers will likely remain unconvinced of the woodpecker's existence. The openness and abundance of the data that Hill shares with the reader should, however, impress even the most cynical of doubters. The author has made an important contribution to the natural history of the Florida panhandle and, if the search efforts ultimately prove fruitful, to the life history of one of the continent's rarest birds. —ROBERT P. RUSSELL, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Birds, 1 Federal Drive, Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056, E-mail: Robert_Russell@fws.gov

The Goshawk.—Robert Kenward. 2006. T & AD Poyser and Buteo Books, London and Shipman, VA. 360 pp., 10 black-and-white and 23 color illustrations. ISBN-13: 9780713665659; ISBN-10: 0713665653. $52.50 (cloth).

Your first encounter with goshawks (*Accipter gentilis*) often leaves an impression that lasts a lifetime, especially if it involves being attacked by an angry female as you approach too close to her nest. I still clearly remember my first encounter when, as a 7th grader, I was invited to the field by two falconers who were hunting a brace of goshawks (i.e., two birds hunting simultaneously) in the scrub oak–covered foothills just west of Denver, Colorado. Both birds sprang from the falconer's fist as a cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*) darted through the scrub oak. The inexperienced juvenile goshawk tried to follow the rabbit's every move until a quick 90° turn left the young hawk grounded below a wire fence. Meanwhile, the other goshawk, an experienced six-year-old female, gained elevation to watch the action. The female then began a powered dive that was perfectly timed to the moment the rabbit tried to shoot across a small opening. She struck the rabbit with such force that both predator and prey tumbled and crashed through the surrounding brush. Goshawks have also left their impression on human history, riding on the fists of Japanese shoguns as status symbols or when providing game to the family cooking pot of 18th century falconers. Therefore, it is fitting that a treatise on goshawks be written by a scientist whose life experience extends beyond scientific inquiry to include a visceral and heartfelt relationship with the species. Robert Kenward's handsome book *The Goshawk* is such a work.

Kenward's book is organized into 10 chapters, with a prologue, forward, and appendices. The brief prologue describes an experience that Kenward had with his captive goshawk, Miss Piggy, a subject of his studies on predation. The prologue and forward set the style for the book, as Kenward begins each chapter with an interesting anecdote, which softens and lightens the book's scientific focus. The chapters span the life history and management of goshawks, including taxonomy, weights and measurements, nesting and brood rearing, movements, diet and prey selection, demography, human interactions, and conservation. Kenward's passion for conservation is an important strength of the book. He ends each chapter with a conservation message, and the final chapter is dedicated to that topic. The first appendix is simply a list of scientific names mentioned in the text, and the second, a list the references that were cited in the figures. The book is thoroughly indexed so it is easy to locate subjects and

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