

IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

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“The great chieftain of the woodpecker tribe,” proclaims Audubon.
Biggest woodpecker in America
feared gone with the Old Growth hardwoods of the Southeast

February 11, 2004:

kayaker in the “Big Woods” swamps of eastern Arkansas
glimpses this immense cartoon,
this Disney caricature that “hitches” behind tree in “herkey jerkey” motion,
icon that brings Cornell Lab ornithologists
secretly kayaking, canoeing the Cache River,
White River National Wildlife Refuges
with notebooks, binoculars, camcorders,
twenty-four autonomous recording units (ARUs) strapped on trees

They get sightings—convincing field marks:
wedge of white on trailing edge of lengthy wings,
double-knock drumming on tree trunks.
But are these conclusive?
Four-second video of woodpecker fleeing from tupelo is murky,
but measurements of film and tree trunk suggest right large size

After fourteen months discussing, debating seven sightings, the video—
The Announcement to the World:
“The Ivory-billed Woodpecker lives...” One

Since the last recorded sighting in 1944
how have birders been experiencing the “Lord God” bird,
(what birders shouted,
sighting this streamlined flying, red-crested woodpecker
with long bill of ivory sheen)?
So many unproved reports.
What have been the sightings, soundings
along the Congaree, Santee Rivers of South Carolina,
in the cypress swamps of Florida, bayous of Louisiana?

Fantasies? Apparitions?
Discernments from the dead?

Is this how our Seventh Generations will experience
West Indian Manatee? Northern Right Whale? Polar Bear?

The bunked-in yacht captain jumps awake from bump against hull,
rushes topside, flashes light on *floating ball*.

"Two big nostrils, I swear it," he asserts.

"Manatee nostrils!"

There are no reports of West Indian Manatee

The pelagic birder balances herself aboard the pitching vessel,
grips binoculars against her eyes.

"I just saw a whale breach!" she shouts.

"Didn't anyone see it?"

Its jaws like a cavern! It was a Northern Right!"

There are no reports of Northern Right Whale

The Inuit shaman

sights something solid, something big, furry,

something white vanishing into blizzard over what once was ice.

"Polar Bear," he insists.

There are no reports of Polar Bear

Are these how our descendents will *see, hear*

Golden Lion Tamarin, Giant Panda, African Elephant,

Karner Blue Butterfly, Kemp's Ridley Turtle, Siberian Sturgeon,

Bicknell's Thrush, Spotted Owl, California Condor?

There will be no reports—no reports of thousands of species