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Bird Believed Extinct Rediscovered After 60 Years

By Leta Hong Fincher

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A bird long thought to be extinct has been rediscovered for the first time in 60 years. Scientists in the United States are calling a landmark rediscovery.

The ivory-billed woodpecker has been sighted for the first time since 1944, in the swamp forests of Arkansas.

John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at Cornell University, announced Thursday that at least one male ivory-bill still survives.

"After 60 years of fading hopes that we would ever see this spectacular bird again, the ivory-billed woodpecker has been rediscovered," says John Fitzpatrick.

The bird is one of the largest species of woodpecker in the world, and one of six North American bird species thought to have become extinct since 1880. The ivory-bill used to range in the woods of southeastern United States.

But it disappeared when extensive logging destroyed many forests.

Scientists say the woodpecker has been spotted independently several times over the past year and a half. Tim Gallagher, editor of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Living Bird magazine and Bobby Harrison, a professor at Oakwood College in Alabama came across the bird in February, 2004.

Mr. Gallagher says they were kayaking in an Arkansas bayou [swamp bay] when the black-and-white woodpecker flew less than 70 feet in front of them.

"We spent one night out and the second day, at about 1:15 in the afternoon, we had a bird fly across in front of us at close range. It was unmistakably an ivory-



Artist's
rendering of
Ivory-Billed
Woodpeckers

bill," says Tim Gallagher.

Two months later, a search team captured four seconds of video of the woodpecker taking off from a tree trunk.

Mr. Fitzpatrick told a news conference in Washington D.C. that the bird has been sought for decades, but until now there has been no firm evidence that it still existed.

"For those of us who tenaciously cling to the idea that humans and earth natural systems can live side by side in harmony, the discovery we're announcing today is the most spectacular moment or ray of hope that I could ever have imagined," says John Fitzpatrick.

Scientists say their goal is to restore 200,000 more acres of forest in eastern Arkansas, partly in the hope that the ivory-billed woodpecker will not disappear for good.



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