

# On the Edge of Existence: Searches for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers along the Chipola River and the resulting Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, 1950-1952

by Fredrik Bryntesson, Robin Cooper, and William C. Hunter

The current status of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers (*Campephilus principalis*; hereafter referred to as “Ivory-bill”) in the Southeast U.S. is controversial. The last widely accepted sighting of an individual from a known population was at the Singer Tract (today mostly overlapping Tensas River NWR) of Louisiana in 1944, but sighting reports and other evidence of persistence have occurred since the 1950s and into the present decade.<sup>1</sup> Even if some of the evi-

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- 1 See for example, John W. Fitzpatrick et al., “Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) Persists in Continental North America,” *Science* 308, no. 5727 (3 June 2005): 1460-1462, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1114103>; Steven C. Latta et al., “Multiple lines of evidence suggest the persistence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) in Louisiana,” *Ecology and Evolution* 13, no. 5 (May 2023): e10017, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.10017>.

dence is compelling (in that the evidence seems to exclude all other reasonable possibilities), none of these reports have established that a population was present or that individuals could be predictably detected with adequate search effort.<sup>2</sup> At best, this evidence suggests that if individual Ivory-bills persist, they do so in ways that are beyond our understanding of what it takes to maintain a viable population. An additional complication is that some researchers may be safeguarding their evidence and hesitant or slow to release findings for various reasons, such as to ensure the safety of the birds.

The lack of universally accepted confirmation of even one individual and certainly no evidence of a population in recent decades prompted the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to propose on September 30, 2021 to delist this species as extinct, along with 22 other species.<sup>3</sup> This proposal led to considerable debate and prompted many researchers to share their comments and findings, and as a result, the USFWS on October 17, 2023 delayed their final decision to an unknown future date.<sup>4</sup>

The Ivory-bill is, regardless of its present status, the largest woodpecker to have inhabited the U.S. in modern times. Roughly the size of a crow, the Ivory-bill's original range in the United States spanned the southeastern coastal plain and almost all of Florida, the Mississippi Valley north at least to include the Ohio and Missouri river valleys, and west to eastern Oklahoma and Texas (Figure 1). This species' habitat comprised mature bottomland forest, cypress swamps, and, in many areas, adjacent open canopied pine forests.<sup>5</sup> By the early 1900's the Ivory-bill numbers had declined drastically, as much of their habitat had been destroyed by logging operations, as well as being shot for specimen collecting or other reasons.<sup>6</sup>

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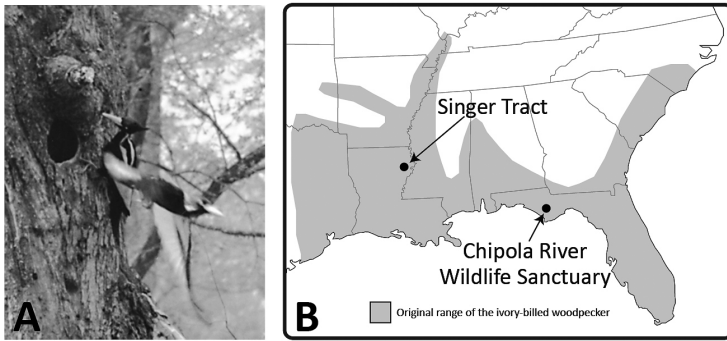
2 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Recovery Plan for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (Campephilus principalis)*, July 19, 2010, 41887, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2010/07/19/2010-17486/recovery-plan-for-the-ivory-billed-woodpecker-campephilus-principalis>.

3 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Removal of 23 Extinct Species from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/09/30/2021-21219/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-removal-of-23-extinct-species-from-the-lists-of>.

4 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Removal of 21 Species From List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife*, October 17, 2023, 71644, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/10/17/2023-22377/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-removal-of-21-species-from-the-list-of-endangered-and>.

5 James T. Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker* (New York: National Audubon Society, 1942), 3-17.

6 Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, 18-19; Noel F. R. Snyder, David E. Brown, and Kevin B. Clark, *The Travails of Two Woodpeckers. Ivory-bills & Imperials*,



**Figure 1.** **A.** Ivory-billed Woodpeckers photographed at their nest cavity in the Singer Tract, LA, in 1935 (photo courtesy of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY). **B.** Map of southeastern U.S. showing the locations of the Singer Tract, the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, and the original range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker as described by James Tanner (James T. Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker* (New York: National Audubon Society, 1942), 17).

In 1932, a small population of Ivory-bills was discovered in the Singer Tract, along the Tensas River southwest of Tallulah, in Louisiana.<sup>7</sup> James Tanner, of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, studied these birds extensively for his doctoral research, a project supervised by Arthur A. Allen and sponsored by the National Audubon Society. However, the Singer Tract was logged in the late 1930s and early 1940s despite considerable attempts by the National Audubon Society, biologists, politicians, and others to protect the area. There are no universally accepted Ivory-bill reports from the Singer Tract after the mid-1940s, and many ornithologists and biologists consider the Ivory-bills in the Singer Tract to have been the last confirmed population of the species in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 63-66.

7 T. Gilbert Pearson, "Protection of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," *Bird-Lore* 34, 1932, 300.

8 Jerome A. Jackson, *In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2006), 138-154. The Singer Tract was not the only location where Ivory-bills were reported and widely accepted by the ornithological community during the 1930s. In 1934-1935, Ivory-bills were encountered along the lower Santee River in South Carolina. These accounts, together with reported sightings of Carolina Parakeets, a bird presumed extinct, resulted in the establishment of the National Audubon Society managed Santee Sanctuary (1936-1938). Between 1934 and 1938 there were a number of sightings of Ivory-bills in this area by different people, including Alexander Sprunt Jr. and Robert P. Allen of the National Audubon Society. James Tanner visited the area four times as part of his doctoral research and noted some feeding sign but did not see the birds. Two significant differences between the Singer

Since 1944, many searches for Ivory-bills have been conducted throughout the Southeastern U.S. by people who have been extraordinarily dedicated and passionate about locating the bird. Such searches, in tandem with random encounters, have produced a substantial number of Ivory-bill reports from the 1940s and into the twenty-first century,<sup>9</sup> some of which generated considerable interest and action. One such search was along the Chipola River just south of Scotts Ferry in Calhoun County, Florida (Figure 2), led by Whitney Eastman (Figure 3), a prominent and passionate seeker of Ivory-bills in the 1950s and the 1960s. Though not a professional ornithologist, Eastman referred to himself as a “clearing house” for Ivory-bill reports,<sup>10</sup> and his extensive efforts and work were recognized by such bodies as The American Ornithologists’ Union’s (AOU) Committee on Bird Protection<sup>11</sup> and leading ornithologists of the day like Alexander Sprunt Jr., who called Eastman an “outstanding worker during the past several years in the search for the Ivory-bill. . . . [and] diligent in the extreme in tracing every report possible to follow up.”<sup>12</sup>

Eastman’s most notable search was in early March of 1950 along the Chipola River, which resulted in two sightings and several auditory encounters that Eastman and his group identified as Ivory-bills. Subsequent investigations in the same area in April 1950 by other searchers also reported encounters with Ivory-bills. Collectively, these reports were so compelling that they led to the establishment of the National Audubon Society-managed Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary on October 2, 1950.<sup>13</sup> The president of the National Audubon Society became personally involved with the sanctuary, reflecting how seriously the Society considered the reports and how much they wanted to establish protective measures for the birds. Because the protection of Ivory-bills was para-

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Tract and the Santee Sanctuary are that the Ivory-bills along the Santee were never photographed, nor was a nesting site ever located in the area (Tanner 1942, Bryntesson, Cooper, and Hunter unpublished data).

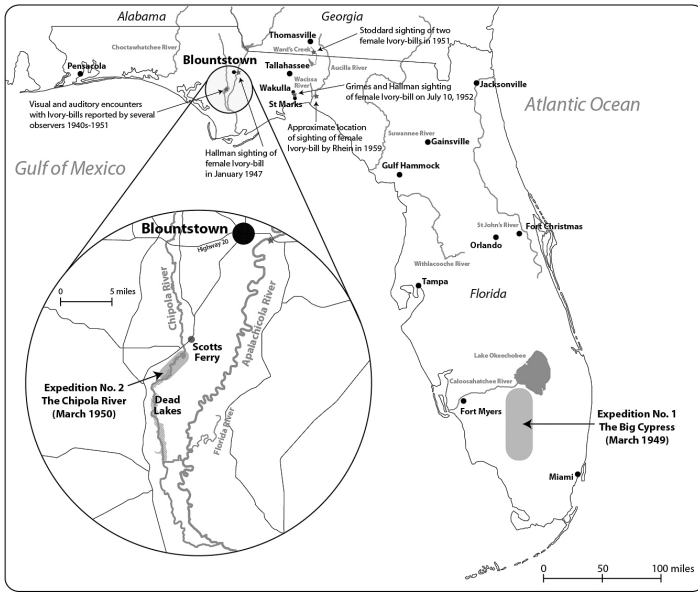
9 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Recovery Plan*, 41887.

10 Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, November 28, 1967.

11 Ira N. Gabrielson et al., “Report to the American Ornithologists’ Union by the Committee on Bird Protection, 1961,” *The Auk* 79, no. 3, (July 1, 1962): 474, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4082829>.

12 Alexander Sprunt Jr., *Florida Bird Life* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., and the National Audubon Society, 1954), 284.

13 John H. Baker, “News of Wildlife and Conservation; Ivory-bills now have Sanctuary,” *Audubon Magazine* 52, (November-December 1950): 391-392; Whitney Eastman, “Ten Year Search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker,” *Atlantic Naturalist* 13 (October-December 1958): 216-228.



**Figure 2.** Map of Florida that shows the general areas where three of Eastman's 1949 and 1950 searches for Ivory-bills took place. The map also shows the locations of other Ivory-bill reports in the late 1940s and 1950s.

mount, though, many of the details of the sanctuary were veiled in secrecy and the exact location has been hitherto unknown.

The search for Ivory-bills along the Chipola River in the early 1950s and the resulting sanctuary has been mentioned in many articles and books but has not thus far received a comprehensive summary or retelling. What follows, drawn from previously uncited primary archival sources such as field notes, reports, and correspondences, in addition to details from the published literature, is a thorough account of the events that led to the sanctuary's establishment and closure, the searches within it, the evidence amassed, and its eventual abandonment. The dramatic history of the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary can now be told more fully than ever before. Not only does it reveal the passion and commitment of those on the quest to find Ivory-bills, but it also exemplifies the change in conservation as a mindset that took place in the 1900s.



**Figure 3.** Whitney Haskins Eastman in 1951 (courtesy of The Whitney H. Eastman Archives, Eastman Nature Center, Dayton, Minnesota). Eastman (1888-1979), vice-president of the General Mills food company in Minneapolis, was an experienced and very passionate amateur ornithologist who had been interested in birds and conservation since a young age. In his lifetime he birded in every state in the U.S. and in many locations across the world, and he regularly published accounts about his birding experiences. He was an Associate of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) and was very active in the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, for which he was president in 1951 and 1952. He was also very active in the Audubon Society both locally and on the national level and served on the Board of the National Audubon Society for several years.

### **The 1950 Discovery of Ivory-Bills at Scotts Ferry**

Whitney Eastman had towards the end of the 1940s become intrigued with the possibility that Ivory-bills still existed. After studying the published literature on the Ivory-bill, he stated that he had "confidence in finding one, even though I realize full well that the number must be dwindling, and in all probability there are very few still in existence."<sup>14</sup> His first search, in the Big Cypress in southern Florida with his friends Edward Rowe and Fred Dye, was unsuccessful, but a chance meeting with snake hunter Eugene Coppedge in

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14 Whitney H. Eastman to Richard H. Pough, May 17, 1949.

the swamp on March 16, 1949, had a profound effect on Eastman's search for Ivory-bills. Coppedge surprised the group with the news that he had recently seen Ivory-bills along the Chipola River in the Florida panhandle. On November 20, 1948, he had caught sight of a male Ivory-bill, and on one occasion, in January 1949, he had spotted a male and female together. These encounters had taken place just south of Scotts Ferry when he visited a local snake hunter named Muriel L. Kelso.<sup>15</sup>

Eastman knew that the Ivory-bill could be confused with the Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*), but after further discussions, Eastman believed Coppedge to be "a thoroughly reliable fellow . . . [who] could possibly not have concocted the story."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Eastman was in 1949 most likely aware of a 1939 assessment by James Tanner, who during his study also searched some of the Apalachicola River area, of which the Chipola River is a tributary. Tanner had not investigated as far north as the Chipola River at Scotts Ferry, but he found areas of good habitat in the southern Apalachicola region along the tributaries Brother's River and Florida River. Reports from locals, potential feeding sign, and tree cavities fit for Ivory-bills had led Tanner to conclude that the Apalachicola River region most likely harbored a few Ivory-bills at least into the early 1940s.<sup>17</sup> Eastman had also, in 1948, received information from his friend Edward Rowe that Ivory-bills could be found close to Blountstown, which was an area that another ornithologist, Herbert Stoddard, likewise considered suitable for Ivory-bills.<sup>18</sup>

15 Whitney H. Eastman, "Field notes for the March 15-16, 1949, expedition in the Big Cypress"; Whitney H. Eastman to George Dock, April 15, 1949. Eastman's description of the Big Cypress expedition in this letter was later published in the *Florida Naturalist*. See Whitney Eastman, "Hunting for Ivory-bills in the Big Cypress," *Florida Naturalist* 22, no. 4 (July 1949), 80; Eastman, "Ten Year Search," 218. Muriel L. Kelso was referred to by Eastman as a snake hunter, guide, and commercial fisherman. Kelso was also a Pentecostal minister. Edward Rowe and Fred Dye were both part of Eastman's effort to locate Ivory-bills in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Eastman referred to them as "my associates in the ivory-bill projects" (Whitney H. Eastman to Herbert L. Stoddard, March 28, 1951).

16 Whitney H. Eastman to Richard H. Pough, May 17, 1949. In his letter to George Dock Jr. on April 15, 1949, Eastman added, "I have implicit confidence in this snake hunter's story. I am convinced he knows the bird intimately as he described the bird in great detail to me. He described the song and the flight and the different appearance of the Ivory-bill from the pileated which he knows so well."

17 Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, 4-5, 28-29, and 92-93.

18 Edward Rowe to Whitney H. Eastman, October 6, 1948; Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, December 17, 1948.

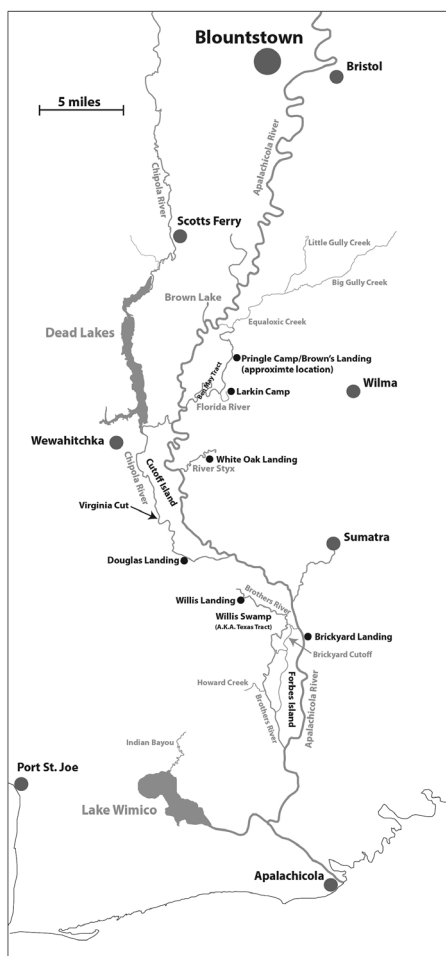


Figure 4. The Apalachicola River Basin.

There were also reports of Ivory-bills in relatively close proximity to Scotts Ferry that Eastman seems to have been unaware of at the time: a reported 1939 sighting at Gully Creek, which is not far from Scotts Ferry on the eastern side of the Apalachicola River (Figure 4);<sup>19</sup> a January 1947 sighting of a female Ivory-bill some 15

19 James T. Tanner, "Field Notes from March 15, 1939." The exact date or year for this observation is unclear.



miles northeast of Scotts Ferry<sup>20</sup>; and a June 25, 1948 publication in the Blountstown paper, *The County Record*, of a letter by Kelsey Blanton, who “heard [the bird’s] voice and its heavy hammering on trees in the swamp” just south of Scotts Ferry, claimed that “a pair nested and reared their young this Spring in a magnolia tree near a neighbor’s home,” and argued that “Through the cooperation of all persons having fishing and hunting camps and lodges, we ought to make a safe and permanent sanctuary for this beautiful bird.”<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of how many of the reports Eastman was familiar with, the chance meeting with Coppedge served as the catalyst for Eastman and his group to start planning for an upcoming search at Scotts Ferry in the spring of 1950, in hopes to prove wrong the “doubting Thomases” as Eastman put it, “who had declared the bird to be extinct.”<sup>22</sup> Eastman received useful advice and encouragement from George Dock Jr. of the National Audubon Society, and especially from ornithologists Alexander Sprunt Jr. and Richard Pough. Sprunt Jr. had seen Ivory-bills in the 1930s and Pough once in the 1940s.<sup>23</sup> They provided Eastman with tips about the type of habitat to search in, that the birds were likely to be roaming large areas as they were searching for food, and the importance of birding by ear.<sup>24</sup> Most notably, Ivory-bills

20 Roy C. Hallman to Whitney H. Eastman, April 14, 1965. John Dennis considered this observation valid. He wrote in 1967, “I would put confidence in reports by Roy C. Hallman, a veteran bird watcher from Panama City, Florida. He saw a bird from the Apalachicola River bridge near Blountstown in 1947.” (John V. Dennis, “The Ivory-billed Woodpecker - - its present status and proposals for its preservation,” Report dated June 12, 1967). Furthermore, Dennis has added in his notes on Ivory-bill sightings in Florida that the bird was seen from the car and that it was perched (John V. Dennis, “Florida Records.”).

21 Kelsey Blanton, “Letters [to the editor],” *The County Record*, June 25, 1948. This is probably the first mentioning of a sanctuary for Ivory-bills at Scotts Ferry. The location is given as “Half Moon Fish Camp” along the Chipola River. This fish camp was located south of Scotts Ferry, in the same vicinity as where the 1950-52 searches took place. It is likely that the neighbor Blanton refers to was Muriel. L. Kelso. Another report was published as a letter by D. C. Ring in the January 1951 issue of *Texas Game and Fish*. The letter was a response to an article in the October 1950 issue of the same publication that in general terms described Eastman’s Ivory-bill discovery. D. C. Ring stated that her son “saw the ivory-bills in the very area of Florida where they are now reported. I have two letters from him telling me of the thrilling find; the second one was dated June 22, 1947, and describes the remote area and his pleasure at seeing the ivory-billed woodpecker.” Although vague and second-hand, this report suggests that it is possible that D. C. Ring’s son saw Ivory-bills in 1947 (and possibly earlier) in the Scotts Ferry area.

22 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950.

23 Fredrik Bryntesson, Robin Cooper, and William C. Hunter, in prep.; Richard H. Pough to John H. Baker, January 8, 1944.

24 Richard H. Pough to Whitney H. Eastman, May 23, 1949; Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, April 20, 1949.

make calls that are nasal and trumpet-like in character, which have led observers to liken them to a “tin trumpet,” and the birds also produce loud double-knocks, which other woodpecker species in the US habitually do not do, by hitting a substrate such as a dead branch with their bills often twice in very close succession (James Tanner had described the knock as a “*bam-bam*, the second note sounding like an immediate echo of the first”).<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Ivory-bills feed either by scaling the bark of dying or recently dead timber or by digging into the wood like other woodpeckers do. Bark scaling, especially extensive areas of it, has been considered a useful suggestive sign of Ivory-bills, even though the slightly smaller Pileated Woodpecker can also produce some bark scaling if the bark is loose, thin, or weak.<sup>26</sup>

Considering the difficulty of finding potential Ivory-bills, Eastman was very grateful for Sprunt Jr. and Pough input,<sup>27</sup> and preparations for a search at Scotts Ferry began as soon as the Big Cypress expedition ended. Coppedge would help guide Eastman, Rowe, and Dye, and Muriel Kelso, the snake hunter and landowner whom Coppedge had been visiting when they spotted Ivory-bills, was willing to help as well, allowing them to search the area, provided they did not bring firearms. It turned out Kelso had known for about a decade about the birds in the area—and the difference between Ivory-bills and Pileateds—and knew how rare and in need of protection the birds were.<sup>28</sup> With the final addition of John V. Dennis, then a graduate student at the University of Florida who had observed the similar Cuban subspecies of Ivory-bills (*Campephilus principalis bairdii*), the plans were finalized for the coming spring.

The group arrived at Kelso's on the evening of March 1, 1950 and had several encouraging encounters in the next few days, searching along the Chipola River between Kelso's property south of Scotts Ferry and the northern parts of the Dead Lakes. While they didn't see any Ivory-bills, on Thursday, March 2 they had four auditory encounters in the morning—three “tin trumpet” calls and a “bam-bam”<sup>29</sup>—and they

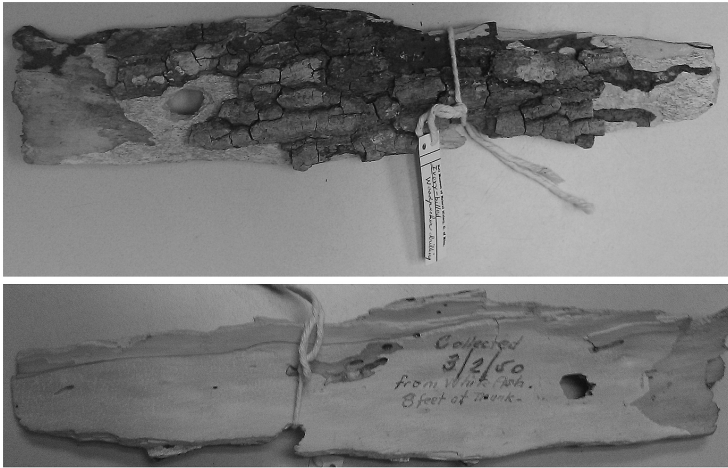
25 see e.g. Bayard Christy, “The Vanishing Ivory-bill,” *Audubon Magazine* 45 (1943): 100; Fredric H. Kennard, “On the Trail of the Ivory-bill,” *The Auk* 32, no. 1 (January 1915): 9; Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, 1 and 61-62.

26 Tanner, *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, 21-22, 41, and 44.

27 Whitney H. Eastman to Richard H. Pough, May 27, 1949; Whitney H. Eastman to Alexander Sprunt Jr., May 17, 1949.

28 Muriel L. Kelso to Whitney H. Eastman, May 21, 1949; Merritt C. Farrar to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 28, 1950.

29 Whitney H. Eastman, “Field Observations by Whitney Eastman 2/25/50 to 3/5/50”; Whitney H. Eastman, “Discovery of Two Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in the Apalachicola River Swamp, Florida, on March 3, 1950,” Typed Field Observations of the Chipola Expedition; Eastman, “Ten Year Search,” 219-220. Eastman refers



**Figure 5.** Piece of bark scaling collected on March 2, 1950, by Whitney Eastman (compare with plate 12 of Allen and Kellogg's *Recent Observations on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*). The piece measures about 13.5 by 2.5-3 inches (Courtesy of the Bell Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota. Photos by Michael Westberg).

found a live ash tree with a dying branch that had recently been almost completely scaled, with "The chips and bark . . . thrown as much as ten feet from the tree"<sup>30</sup> (Figure 5). That afternoon they visited an area in the surrounding pine woods that had been cut three months earlier, where Kelso had purportedly seen a pair of Ivory-bills at the end of December 1949. The logging operation had left the tops of logged pine trees on the ground, and in many of these tops they noticed considerable, recent bark scaling. Eastman also noted feeding sign in some damaged but still-standing pine trees that were now dying.<sup>31</sup> Early in the morning the next day, Friday, March 3, the group again visited the scaled ash tree but did not see the birds. Nevertheless, Eastman attributed these various feeding signs and auditory encounters to Ivory-bills.<sup>32</sup>

At breakfast that same day Kelso continued a story he had begun the previous day and told the group that Ivory-bills had nested close to his house for six years. He initially thought they nested

to the vocalizations he heard as "tin trumpet" calls in his *Atlantic Naturalist* article.

30 Eastman, "Discovery."

31 Eastman, "Discovery."

32 Eastman, "Field Observations by Whitney Eastman 2/25/50 to 3/5/50". Eastman, "Discovery."

in a magnolia, but when he had cut a cypress for timber he discovered that he had inadvertently cut the nesting tree. After breakfast, perhaps because of this story, John Dennis left the expedition<sup>33</sup> because, as he stated much later in 1979, he had become skeptical about the value of the investigation and Kelso's tales, which Dennis considered "backwoods embellishment."<sup>34</sup> He may have left too readily, however, because just afterward the group had more auditory encounters, including some "tin trumpet" calls from two birds, one apparently answering the other. Eastman, moving in the direction of the calls, then "sighted a male flying across a swamp area. . . [that] alighted near the top of a large cypress tree. . ."<sup>35</sup> According to Eastman, Coppedge also saw the bird, and in his handwritten fieldnotes, Eastman joyfully referred to the sighting as the "Greatest thrill of my ornithological career."<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the "glimpse of this gaudy bird,"<sup>37</sup> as Eastman later put it, that morning he also collected some larvae he found underneath the bark of a dying pine tree. Authorities from the Minnesota Museum of Natural History identified the larvae as the southern pine sawyer (*Monochamus titillator*), which was thought to be, if consumed by Ivory-bills, "apparently a new development in the feeding habits of these birds, which have been thought to be dependent on the dead trees of mature forests"<sup>38</sup> rather than dead tops of logged pines. The president of the Florida Audubon Society, John Storer, also noted that this "would seem to open up interesting new possibilities for their preservation through proper management of their breeding grounds."<sup>39</sup> Eastman, though, was

33 Eastman, "Field Observations by Whitney Eastman 2/25/50 to 3/5/50".

34 John V. Dennis, "The Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis*," *Avicultural Magazine* 85 (1979): 79. In this article Dennis also states that he was astonished when he learned that Ivory-bills had been seen after he left the expedition. However, the skepticism Dennis described in 1979 is not evident in letters and conversations he had with Eastman, Herbert Stoddard, John Storer and John Baker in 1950 and 1951. Interestingly, Dennis never mentioned anything about what he saw or heard on March 2 in his published accounts, including the auditory encounters Eastman described, the feeding sign observed in pines, or the bark pieces that Eastman said Dennis collected from the ash tree.

35 Eastman, "Discovery."

36 Eastman, "Field Observations by Whitney Eastman 2/25/50 to 3/5/50".

37 Whitney H. Eastman, "Rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," *Minnesota Naturalist* 1, no. 3 (January 1951): 7. Eastman added in this article that "The male with its flaming red crest and his glossy black and white pattern either in flight or at rest, gives one the thrill of a lifetime..."

38 Walter H. Breckenridge to Whitney H. Eastman, August 14, 1950; John H. Storer to Whitney H. Eastman, April 25, 1950.

39 John H. Storer to Whitney H. Eastman, April 25, 1950.

not as surprised by the potential feeding habit, assuming instead, based on a previous reference to Ivory-bills feeding on roots of burned pine forests, that the birds had "done this for years but no one has ever observed it and reported it."<sup>40</sup>

The following day, Saturday, March 4 at 11 am, they had one more positive encounter. On the banks of the river outside Kelso's house, Eastman, Rowe, Coppedge, and Kelso all saw a female Ivory-bill fly across the river. Eastman described in his fieldnotes that "The river was quite wide at this point and we could see the color pattern of the bird in flight and observe the rolling flight of the ivory-bill as contrasted to the deep undulating bounding flight of the Pileated Woodpecker. My binocular was wet and I could not determine sex but Messrs. Kelso and Coppedge both are positive that it was a female. The bird apparently alighted in a large island swamp. Shortly after the bird disappeared, we heard the typical ivory-bill bam-bam."<sup>41</sup>

Although they couldn't continue the search after this second sighting, the men were obviously encouraged by what they had heard and seen over the previous days. To protect the birds, the group agreed to not publicize exactly where the encounters had been.<sup>42</sup> Instead, Eastman prepared a typed and confidential summary of his fieldnotes that only stated that the sightings had taken place in the "Apalachicola River Swamp," which he shared with other ornithologists.<sup>43</sup> In March 1950 he also published a general account of the search in *The Flicker*, a periodical by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, and shared the findings of the search with his local newspaper, *The Minneapolis Star*.<sup>44</sup> In addition, he sent postcards to his friends to let them know that he had seen Ivory-bills. Alexander Sprunt Jr. wrote back and said, "CONGRATULATIONS! Am delighted it was you who found the bird. You *deserved* it."<sup>45</sup>

It is noteworthy that Eastman's sightings were taken seriously by many in the ornithological community. The AOU's Committee of Bird Protection listed the sightings in a report that was published in July 1950;<sup>46</sup> the AOU included Eastman's report in their

40 Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Storer, May 2, 1950.

41 Eastman, "Discovery."

42 Eugene Coppedge to Whitney H. Eastman, April 15, 1950.

43 Eastman, "Discovery."

44 Whitney H. Eastman, "Ivory-billed Woodpecker seen in Apalachicola river swamp area in Florida." *The Flicker* 22, no. 1 (March 1950): 19; "Ivory-bills in Florida. Local expert sights rare woodpeckers," *Minneapolis Star*, March 15, 1950.

45 Alexander Sprunt, Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, March 12, 1950.

46 Gabrielson et al., "Report," 320.

published checklist of North American birds;<sup>47</sup> ornithologist Herbert Stoddard stated in 1951 that he had “every confidence in the observations of Whitney Eastman after spending a few days with him in the field”<sup>48</sup>; and the sightings were included by Alexander Sprunt Jr. in his 1954 book *Florida Bird Life*.<sup>49</sup> Even James Tanner was initially optimistic about Eastman’s sightings (though he would later change his views about the Ivory-bill reports at Scotts Ferry).<sup>50</sup>

Unfortunately, word of the potential location started to spread in ways the group did not want. Sometime during the search, Kelso had introduced Eastman to Kelsey Blanton—who had previously written to the editor of the *County Record* in Blountstown about Ivory-bills around Scotts Ferry—with whom Eastman had shared the group’s findings.<sup>51</sup> Blanton immediately wrote a new letter to the editor of *The County Record* that was published on March 10, only six days after the conclusion of the search. The letter mentioned the discovery, Kelso’s name, and that it had been on the Chipola River.<sup>52</sup> Then more details about the location—this time from a friend of Coppedge and Kelso, who, at the time, most likely did not realize that the information was confidential—were published in the *Miami Herald* on March 26, in an article that described the discovery, mentioned it had taken place at Scotts Ferry, and also printed Kelso’s name.<sup>53</sup> Alexander Sprunt Jr., upon reading the *Miami Herald* article, was furious and told Eastman that the article provided details that were “enough for any collector who might have designs on the birds...”<sup>54</sup>

### Other Searches for Ivory-Bills at Scotts Ferry in The Spring of 1950

At the very least, whether specimen collectors were on the prowl or not, word of Eastman’s findings was spreading among ornithologists, who started conducting their own follow-up searches. One

47 American Ornithologists’ Union, *Check-List of North American Birds* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, Inc., 1957): 331, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/107973#page/349/mode/1up>.

48 Herbert L. Stoddard to Samuel A. Grimes, May 1, 1951.

49 Sprunt Jr., *Florida Bird Life*, 284.

50 James T. Tanner to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 8, 1950.

51 Eugene Coppedge to Whitney H. Eastman, April 15, 1950.

52 Kelsey Blanton, “Letters,” *The County Record*, March 10, 1950. Blanton’s letter to the editor also included that “A sanctuary for the protection of the ivory bill is being planned.”

53 Edith L. Rackstraw, “2 Ivory Billed Woodpeckers sighted in Everglades,” *Miami Herald*, March 26, 1950.

54 Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, March 30, 1950.

such ornithologist, Henry Stevenson, who had conducted his doctoral research at Cornell University under Arthur A. Allen, just like James Tanner, and who in 1950 worked at the Florida State University in Tallahassee, began looking on April 3 with companions Rick West and William Cross.

Kelso was at home but was unable to guide the group. They were nevertheless impressed by what he told them and set out on the Chipola River in West's canoe. During the trip, in addition to calls Stevenson identified as coming from Ivory-bills, Stevenson and West reported seeing a large woodpecker they thought was an Ivory-bill at a distance of 30-50 yards (Stevenson claimed to have seen it once and West at least twice, but Cross not at all). They saw the bird against the sun so all they could see was its large size and shape with a crest and that it flew in a direct manner (i.e., not undulating like a Pileated).<sup>55</sup>

At the time, Stevenson thought that he had seen an Ivory-bill, but he expressed some caution in a letter to Tanner dated April 25, 1950 because of the silhouetted, colorless nature of the sighting. Ultimately, he noted that he was "reasonably certain of the identification, but of course a record with any degree of uncertainty has no value to someone else, and doesn't leave me exactly satisfied."<sup>56</sup> He later stated, "The view West and I had together was of a very large, swiftly flying woodpecker seen against the light, so that color could not be determined. Because it had the shape of a large woodpecker with a crest and flew fast and straight, I had no doubt that it was an Ivory-bill."<sup>57</sup>

Tanner and Herbert Stoddard did not consider it a positive identification,<sup>58</sup> but Stevenson much later in life remained convinced, asserting on at least three occasions in the late 1980s and early 90s that he had seen an Ivory-bill on the Chipola River in 1950.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the sighting was included in definite terms in Stevenson and Bruce Anderson's *Birdlife of Florida* published

55 Henry M. Stevenson to James T. Tanner, April 25, 1950; Richard L. West, interview by Fredrik Bryntesson, August 8, 2011. Henry M. Stevenson, "Notes for Birdlife of Florida."

56 Henry M. Stevenson to James T. Tanner, April 25, 1950.

57 Stevenson, "Notes for Birdlife."

58 Herbert L. Stoddard, "Memo on May 27-28, 1950 visit to Scotts Ferry looking for ivorybills," written on May 29, 1950; James T. Tanner to Robert P. Allen, December 28, 1950.

59 Henry M. Stevenson to John K. Terres, January 13, 1987, quoted in John K. Terres, "My Greatest Birding Day," *Bird Watcher's Digest* 9, (July-August 1987): 88; Henry M. Stevenson to Chief Officer Endangered Species Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, December 5, 1989; Henry M. Stevenson to David Pashley, April 1, 1991.



in 1994, three years after Stevenson's death.<sup>60</sup> Stevenson also described auditory encounters during the trip on April 3, 1950, saying, "Much as I concentrated on the call note (familiar from recordings), I heard it only a few times & then evidently at some distance."<sup>61</sup>

Another group arrived just six days after Stevenson, West, and Cross had searched the area. This time it was John Dennis, who returned to the area after learning about the sightings in March. Dennis was accompanied by his friend Davis Crompton of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Margaret Farrar, and her husband Merritt, who was the Executive Director of the Florida Audubon Society. The group, guided by Kelso and Coppedge, looked for Ivory-bills between April 9 and 11.

Dennis considered the search successful and immediately reported to Eastman that "Several members of the party had brief glimpses of individual Ivorybills, and we heard them on several occasions."<sup>62</sup> Crompton later provided some details about two sightings, on April 9 and 10, the first by a guide, presumably Kelso, and the second by the Farrars, who "saw an Ivory-bill as it flew over their heads in the swamp at about eleven o'clock in the morning."<sup>63</sup> Gene Coppedge told Eastman that the Farrars saw a female Ivory-bill. Coppedge had by April 1950 moved to Scotts Ferry and he told Eastman that he had

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60 Henry M. Stevenson and Bruce H. Anderson, *Birdlife of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 408.

61 Henry M. Stevenson to James Tanner, February 9, 1989. In his unpublished "Notes for Birdlife of Florida," Stevenson writes, "During the day we heard what seemed to be Ivory-bill call notes on more than one occasion (at some distance)."

62 John V. Dennis to Whitney H. Eastman, April 13, 1950. Dennis does not mention who saw the birds in his letter to Eastman. He also never described the details of this search in his publications, although he refers briefly to it in his 1979 article [Dennis, "The Ivory-billed Woodpecker," 79] in which he only states, "I made a return trip to the region and saw nothing." Just as with the March search, Dennis does not himself admit to having had any encounters, and it is possible that he at a later point in life developed doubts about the reports from others participating in the search. It is also noteworthy that Eastman referred to the sightings during the April 9-11 search (based on the letter he received from Dennis) in April-May 1950 correspondence with John Dennis, James Tanner, John Baker, and Josselyn Van Tyne. However, for some reason, Eastman did not include these findings in his 1958 published account [Eastman, "Ten Year Search."].

63 Davis H. Crompton, "My Search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Florida," *Massachusetts Audubon Society Bulletin* 34, no. 6 (October 1950): 236.



"seen the ivory bill almost every day since I have been here. Sometimes both male and female in the same day."<sup>64</sup>

Dennis and the Farrars left on April 11, but Crompton remained in the area for a few days and got a brief glimpse of a bird that he thought was Ivory-bill. He also heard more vocalizations he thought were suitable, but he never saw the birds that made the calls. He noted that the calls he heard at Scotts Ferry were "connected to" and had a "faint resemblance to the calls of the Cuban Ivory-bill," that along with Dennis he had encountered in Cuba in 1948. However, Crompton thought the calls he heard on the Chippola were different and had a Flicker-like quality.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, while it is entirely possible that Crompton misidentified or misremembered the calls he heard, John Dennis noted his "remarkable memory for detail"<sup>66</sup> and there are accounts by, for example, Arthur Allen, James Tanner, and Bayard Christy that state Ivory-bills could sometimes sound like Flickers,<sup>67</sup> which lends Crompton's descriptions some weight.

Although Stevenson and Dennis didn't publish their findings at the time, the search by Eastman led to the aforementioned newspaper articles, which listed the location where the Ivory-bills had been seen and mentioned Kelso's name. Kelso was then receiving numerous letters from people who wanted to see the birds and searchers had started to show up in the region. Kelso, feeling protective of the birds, was not pleased with this attention, fearing that specimen collectors would surface. When Merritt Farrar visited Kelso between April 9 and 11, a plan was therefore devised to protect the Ivory-bills: from that point on, any searcher needed a written permit from either Farrar or Alexander Sprunt Jr. to be allowed by Kelso into the area.<sup>68</sup> This action was the first formal measure taken to protect the reported Ivory-bills at Scotts Ferry.

64 Gene Coppedge to Whitney H. Eastman, April 15, 1950.

65 Crompton, "My Search," 236-237.

66 John V. Dennis, "Davis Crompton and the Cuban Ivory-billed Woodpecker," *Bird Watcher's Digest* 9, no. 4 (1987): 19.

67 Arthur A. Allen and P. Paul Kellogg, "Recent Observations on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," *The Auk* 54, no. 2 (April 1937): 182. The authors state, "based on their personal observations, '[Ivory-bills] have a wide variety of conversational notes when they exchange places at the nest, which are suggestive of similar notes of the Flicker'; Christy, 'The Vanishing Ivory-bill,' 100; James Tanner, 'Field notes from March 30, 1937.'"

68 Muriel L. Kelso to Whitney H. Eastman, April 17, 1950; Merritt C. Farrar to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 28, 1950.



**Figure 6.** Rotting stump of an ash tree with woodpecker holes photographed by Bayard Read in April 1950 (courtesy of The Whitney H. Eastman Archives, Eastman Nature Center, Dayton, Minnesota). Compare with the similar appearance of photos of ivory-billed woodpecker diggings in the photos on p. 300 of T. G. Pearson's *Protection of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*, and plate 11 of James Tanner's *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker* (New York: National Audubon Society, 1942). Muriel Kelso is standing at the base of the stump measuring woodpecker workings.

Meanwhile, both Alexander Sprunt Jr. and Whitney Eastman contacted Bayard Read, a photographer for the National Audubon Society (the father of Nancy Lamb, who together with her husband George studied Cuban Ivory-bills in 1956), about visiting Scotts Ferry with the hope of taking pictures of Ivory-bills.<sup>69</sup> Read visited Kelso between April 25 and 28, 1950. He didn't see any Ivory-bills

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, March 30, 1950; Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, April 13, 1950.

and thus did not get any pictures of them (though Kelso reported seeing them twice), but he and Kelso did find more evidence of fresh feeding, some in dying pine trees, but nearly all in the tops of pine trees left on the ground by wood cutting crews. Read photographed Kelso standing next to one dead stump of an ash tree that was full of woodpecker workings that Read thought had been done by Ivory-bills (Figure 6). Read also found a significant amount of feeding sign on hardwoods and noted potential nesting and roosting cavities in the area.<sup>70</sup>

In addition, Read several times heard calls he attributed to Ivory-bills and provided a good description of these calls, which he said were “unmistakable - a trumpet-like note different from anything I’ve ever heard.” At one point he thought he heard several different birds make these calls and therefore noted that “the birds - at least four, possibly more - are there.”<sup>71</sup> Afterward, he submitted a report to Eastman, which Eastman then shared with John Baker, President of the National Audubon Society.<sup>72</sup> This report later played a very important role in the establishment of the sanctuary.

One other significant search around the same time was that of ornithologist Herbert Stoddard (Figure 7), who had personal experience with Ivory-bills from his childhood years and a very keen interest in the species. James Tanner, who had received advice from Stoddard about how to search for Ivory-bills during Tanner’s fieldwork in the 1930s, had received a copy of the *Miami Herald* article and promptly notified Herbert Stoddard about the Ivory-bill reports at Scotts Ferry.<sup>73</sup> Stoddard had followed up on other reports and searched for these birds several times during his adult life. However, he had not seen Ivory-bills during his searches and hoped to have a change of luck at Scotts Ferry.<sup>74</sup>

On April 16, Stoddard arrived, accompanied by a returning Henry Stevenson. There they found out about the new protective measures when Kelso turned them back since they did not have permits. Stoddard, who certainly wanted to safeguard any remaining

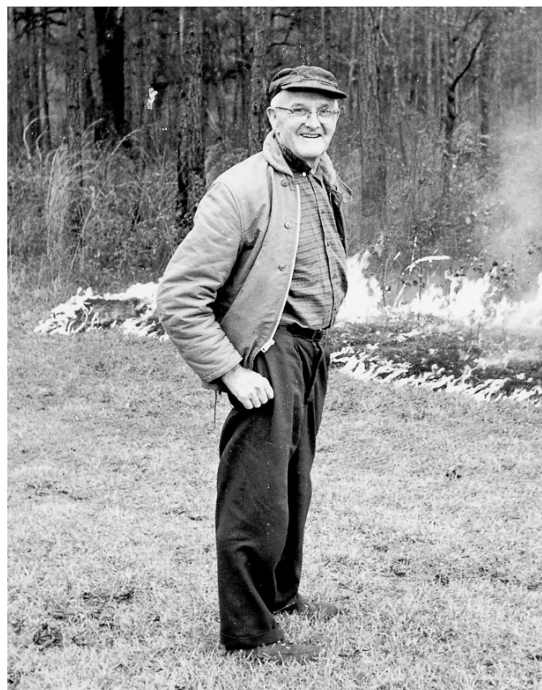
70 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950.

71 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950.

72 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, June 29, 1950.

73 James T. Tanner to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 8, 1950.

74 Fredrik Bryntesson, William C. Hunter, and Jim Cox, “Herbert Stoddard’s Search for the Lost Spirit of the Southern Wilderness,” *Tall Timbers eJournal* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 38-45; Herbert L. Stoddard to Merritt C. Farrar, April 17, 1950.



**Figure 7.** Herbert Lee Stoddard (1889-1970) in the early 1960s (Courtesy of Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy, Tallahassee, Florida). Stoddard was a highly regarded scientist whose groundbreaking work on fire ecology and forest and game management played a vital role in the founding of the Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy in 1958, for which he was originally vice president and director, and later, president. He was also a distinguished ornithologist who earned the American Ornithologists' Union's (AOU) prestigious Brewster Medal in 1935 for his groundbreaking work on the Bobwhite Quail (*Colinus virginianus*), and who was also elected to prestigious and important roles in the AOU: Associate in 1912, Fellow in 1936, and twice, between 1947-50 and 1952-55, a member of its governing Council.

Ivory-bills, was actually quite pleased with this initial refusal and praised Kelso's actions in letters to Farrar, Sprunt Jr., and Tanner.<sup>75</sup> Knowing they shared the same aim and wanting to "help the good

<sup>75</sup> Herbert L. Stoddard to Merritt C. Farrar, April 17, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to Alexander Sprunt Jr., April 17, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to James T. Tanner, April 17, 1950. Stoddard afterwards expressed confidence that there were Ivory-bills in the area based on his conversations with Kelso on April 16. Stevenson likewise expressed confidence in Kelso's statements about the birds and added in a letter to Tanner on April 25, 1950, that Kelso "revealed that there are at least two pairs; that the site of one nest has been discovered and the approximate location of the other." However, none of the follow-up searches during the spring of 1950 reported a nesting site.

work of the preservation along,”<sup>76</sup> Stoddard was quick to offer his services as a local ornithologist with “some familiarity with the species,” thereby procuring the necessary permit.<sup>77</sup>

Permit in tow, Stoddard returned to Scotts Ferry and searched the area with Kelso on May 27 and 28. He did not encounter Ivory-bills during this visit but was not particularly concerned about this because the foliage significantly reduced visibility in the swamp and because Kelso had told him that he had not seen the birds for a while.<sup>78</sup> Stoddard did note, however, that the habitat, although small in size, looked relatively good. The only trees in the swamp that had been logged were the larger cypress, but other hardwoods had been left, and the bottomland was surrounded by pines that were relatively young. He observed woodpecker feeding sign in the hardwoods and stated that in some areas of the dying water oak “there are considerable numbers of old and new nest holes, roost holes and digging of all ages.”<sup>79</sup> As for some of the possible feeding sign on pines, he noted that it “looked like characteristic work”<sup>80</sup> but acknowledged the difficulty in determining with certainty whether it was due to Ivory-bills. He later told Merritt Farrar, “I would only be able to recognize Ivory-bill sign as distinctive *If* I saw a big old pine that the birds had completely skinned. My familiarity with the birds was fifty years ago, and minute differences of sign would not be evident if indeed it can ever be told with certainty....”<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Stoddard was skeptical of a possible nesting cavity that Kelso had noticed, which Kelso thought might be the new nest effort of one of the two pairs of Ivory-bills he claimed had been in the area. When Stoddard had mimicked the food-tapping sounds of Pileateds, two Pileateds appeared at the site.<sup>82</sup>

Yet despite not finding convincing evidence during his search, Stoddard remained affirmative about the Ivory-bill reports at Scotts Ferry and optimistic he would see them eventually. In his personal memo for the trip he wrote that if the Ivory-bills were not present, “a lot of folks are surely badly mistaken,”<sup>83</sup> and he maintained to Sprunt Jr. that “the immediate environment looks good, and the proximity of the great Apalach Swamp makes it look better...

76 Herbert L. Stoddard to Merritt C. Farrar, April 17, 1950.

77 Herbert L. Stoddard to Muriel L. Kelso, May 21, 1950.

78 Herbert L. Stoddard, “Memo on May 27-28, 1950 visit to Scotts Ferry looking for ivorybills,” written on May 29, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to Alexander Sprunt, July 10, 1950.

79 Stoddard, “Memo on May 27-28.”

80 Stoddard, “Memo on May 27-28.”

81 Herbert L. Stoddard to Merritt C. Farrar, July 14, 1950.

82 Stoddard, “Memo on May 27-28.”

83 Stoddard, “Memo on May 27-28.”

I HAVE HOPES. Lords willing, *and DEVIL DONT CARE*, will see them again after fifty years.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Discussions on how to Protect The Ivory-Bills And The Establishment of The Sanctuary**

Discussions for how to best provide protection for the Ivory-bills began after the conclusion of the search by Eastman's group in March. These conversations, spearheaded by Eastman and John Baker, President of the National Audubon Society, were initially based on the evidence and information that Eastman provided from his search and what he had learned from Kelso and locals he had met, but later they brought in details provided by John Dennis and Bayard Read from their April searches. It appears neither Eastman nor the National Audubon Society were aware of the findings from Stevenson, Crompton, and Stoddard, but even without this information, the idea to protect the area was well supported. In the end, although some were of the opinion that the Florida Audubon Society should, if it were financially capable, oversee the protection, the project was carried out by the National Audubon Society,<sup>85</sup> a reflection of how important the prospects of the birds were on a national level. And it was not only the ornithologists who stood behind the effort. Eastman had gotten to know various locals and landowners and thought they too would be very supportive of protective measures for the birds.<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, while specimen collectors were a concern to some,<sup>87</sup> Eastman was not too worried about collectors traveling to the area to shoot the birds as he felt that Kelso would stop anyone who tried to get into the area with such purposes.<sup>88</sup> Eastman's biggest fear, rather, was that locals might shoot the birds for food or by mistake, especially outside the potential boundaries of a sanctuary. Therefore, he believed the most important protective measure was to create an educational program that would inform locals about the

84 Herbert L. Stoddard to Alexander Sprunt, Jr. July 10, 1950.

85 Merritt C. Farrar to Herbert L. Stoddard, August 25, 1950; National Audubon Society, "News Release about the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary," October 3, 1950.

86 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, April 19, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950.

87 Kenneth D. Morrison to Whitney H. Eastman, March 21, 1950; Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Whitney H. Eastman, March 30, 1950.

88 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 25, 1950.



Ivory-bill and its precarious situation, and how to distinguish them from other potential targets such as pintail ducks.<sup>89</sup>

Other proposals were considered as well. One was to manufacture food for the Ivory-bills that would help their chances to breed, though this was eventually dismissed due to potential dependence on this manufactured diet.<sup>90</sup> Another was to publish the findings in general terms that would “build up public interest in this rare bird and go a long way in working out some arrangement for protection.”<sup>91</sup> Along these lines, several publications were made during the spring and early summer, including an article in *Audubon Magazine* that was published by the National Audubon Society.<sup>92</sup> Yet other suggestions were to establish a research fellowship or research station that would benefit the birds,<sup>93</sup> or guided tours in the area for people with permits. The tours would not be telling people exactly where the Ivory-bills were, but instead “letting them take their chances on seeing the bird in flight.”<sup>94</sup>

John Baker, though, no doubt remembering the failure to protect the Singer Tract in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was especially keen to establish a physical sanctuary for the birds.<sup>95</sup> Baker knew that Ivory-bills were known to require a substantial home range. Likewise, Eastman had come to the conclusion based on discussions with Kelso that, although the birds had their home base in the area, they roamed for “a few miles in search of food.” Therefore, a

89 Eastman, “Discovery.”; Eastman, “Ivory-billed Woodpecker seen,” 19. Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, April 19, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 25, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to Josselyn Van Tyne, May 1, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Storer, May 2, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to Eugene Coppedge, May 9, 1950.

90 Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 25, 1950; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, May 4, 1950.

91 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950.

92 see e.g. “Ivory-bills in Florida,” *Audubon Magazine* 52 (May-June 1950): 169; “Ivory-bills in Florida. Local expert sights rare woodpeckers,” *Minneapolis Star*, March 15, 1950; “Ivory-billed Woodpeckers Guarded in Hideout,” *Science News Letter* 57, (June 17, 1950); “Rare birds in Florida,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 9, 1950; “Rare Ivory-billed woodpeckers discovered by the Whitney Eastmans,” *The Minnesota Naturalist* 1, no.1 (July 1950): 4; Eastman, “Ivory-billed Woodpecker seen,” 19. The exact location of the sightings was not given in these publications. Instead, it was referred to in some publications very generally as in Florida or in some cases more specifically as the Apalachicola River area or even that it was close to Blountstown.

93 John H. Storer to Whitney H. Eastman, April 25, 1950.

94 Eugene Coppedge to Whitney H. Eastman, April 15, 1950.

95 Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, April 19, 1950; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, May 4, 1950.

sanctuary needed to be relatively large in size. Baker initially suggested that it should cover “at least 3,000 to 4,000 acres”, and Eastman thought that it needed to be “at least an area four or five miles in diameter in that particular area.”<sup>96</sup>

Eastman was not necessarily against creating a sanctuary, but he thought that protective measures such as education were more important.<sup>97</sup> He was of the opinion that the birds were relatively safe from outside visitors.<sup>98</sup> He also knew that a large portion of the region was a game preserve, with a warden, where hunting was not allowed, that the local landowners only carried out selective cutting, and that there was no risk that the available food for the birds would disappear.<sup>99</sup> There was also the problem of not knowing precisely where to anchor a sanctuary, because no live nesting location had yet been located. Neither Eastman nor Dennis had discovered one in use, and Dennis contended it would be challenging to find a nest site due to the water levels and the foliage in the swamp.<sup>100</sup>

In fact, in April and May of 1950, Eastman repeatedly expressed that there was little point in establishing a sanctuary without a confirmed nesting site,<sup>101</sup> the presence of which, he stated, would allow them to “go about it [establishing a sanctuary] in a much more scientific and businesslike manner.”<sup>102</sup> However, Eastman’s concerns about a nesting site appear to have been eased somewhat in June 1950 when Bayard Read shared that he had found possible nesting cavities in two trees. The first tree was near where Read had heard a pair of Ivory-bills at the end of April, and the second was near where Eastman himself had seen a male Ivory-bill and not far from the pine trees where feeding sign had been observed. However, Read observed this tree for a couple of hours and did not see

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96 John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, April 17, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 25, 1950. Baker’s estimate of up to 4,000 acres seems to be derived from Tanner’s published Ivory-bill home range estimate of 6 square miles.

97 Whitney H. Eastman to Josselyn Van Tyne, May 1, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Storer, May 2, 1950.

98 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 25, 1950.

99 Eastman, “Discovery.”; Whitney H. Eastman to Josselyn Van Tyne, May 1, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950.

100 John V. Dennis to Whitney H. Eastman, April 13, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John Baker, April 25, 1950.

101 Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, April 19, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to Josselyn Van Tyne, May 1, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to Eugene Coppedge, May 9, 1950.

102 Whitney H. Eastman to Eugene Coppedge, May 9, 1950.



any Ivory-bills.<sup>103</sup> Kelso also reported to Eastman in June that he had located a nesting tree where the breeding attempt had failed<sup>104</sup> (it seems neither Eastman nor the National Audubon Society were aware of Kelso's earlier mentions to Stoddard about the possible nesting sites). Read and Kelso's info didn't provide definitive proof of a nesting site, but it may have assuaged some of the concerns and been helpful in the planning process for the sanctuary.

The notion of a sanctuary with a warden was further bolstered in early June when Bayard Read submitted his report from his visit to Scotts Ferry. The report was well-written and convincing, and both Eastman and Baker thought very highly of it.<sup>105</sup> In addition to the details about potential nest cavities, Read stated there were four or more Ivory-bills present in the area and that he had found a significant amount of feeding sign. Furthermore, while there was no hunting season when he visited, Read still heard shooting, so he was concerned about people hunting the birds without stricter regulations and a physical sanctuary with a warden. He did not think that educational programs would be sufficient on their own to protect the birds and urged that protection be in place before the upcoming hunting season.<sup>106</sup>

Read's recommendations included proposed boundaries of a sanctuary that covered an area of 1,600-1,800 acres (see Figure 8). Read insisted that the area should be posted and closed to anyone who did not have permits and that severe punishments should be handed out for harming the birds or even entering the area without permission, which he equated with perturbing the birds. The habitat should be protected, and some selective killing of trees should be carried out to provide food for the Ivory-bills.<sup>107</sup> Read and Eastman also both claimed that Kelso would make the ideal warden because he was knowledgeable about the area and knew how to protect it, because he had the respect and confidence of landowners and locals alike, and because he himself was keenly interested in the project.<sup>108</sup>

103 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950.

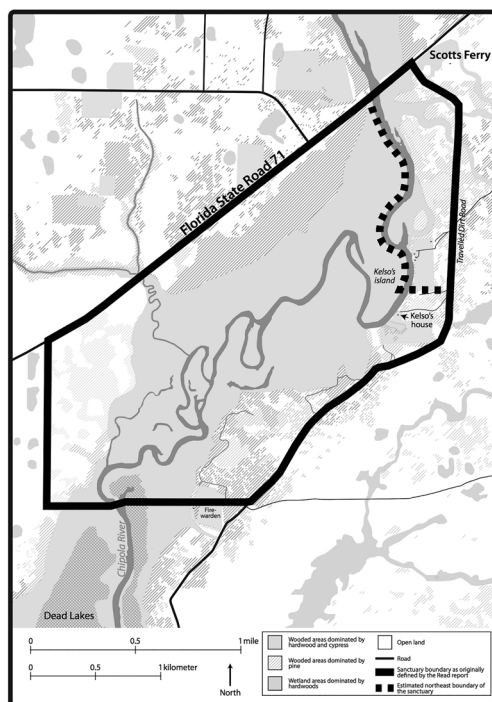
104 Muriel L. Kelso to Whitney H. Eastman, June 23, 1950. Compare with Herbert Stoddard's account from his search on May 27-28, 1950.

105 Whitney H. Eastman to Muriel L. Kelso, June 12, 1950; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, June 29, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950.

106 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950.

107 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950.

108 Bayard W. Read to Whitney H. Eastman, June 3, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to Kenneth D. Morrison, April 11, 1950.



**Figure 8.** Estimated boundaries of the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary. Aerial photographs of the area from 1949 available at the digital collections of University of Florida (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/aerials>) were utilized to make this map. The boundaries of the sanctuary are based on the following sources: Bayard Read's report to Whitney Eastman on June 3, 1950; a hand-drawn map of the sanctuary from Robert Allen's report to the National Audubon Society on December 26, 1950; Herbert Stoddard's notes from his May 27-28, 1950 visit; and an interview with Leon Neel. The sanctuary area west of the river belonged to St. Joe Paper Company, and the sanctuary area to the east of the river belonged to Kelso (northern part) and The Neil Lumber and Manufacturing Company (all land south of Kelso's property). The actual boundary line in the northeastern corner of the sanctuary is uncertain. It is clear from the hand-drawn map in Robert Allen's report that the sanctuary did not cover the area between the river and the road that went by Kelso's property all the way up to Florida State Road 71. Along these lines, Neel said that Kelso's property did not extend all the way up to Florida State Road 71. The road that marks the eastern boundary of the sanctuary is referred to as "Travelled dirt road" by Read, and "Graded road" on the map in Allen's report. Dr. Eugene Potapov, Bryn Athyn College, calculated the area of the sanctuary boundaries in the map above to be about 1,300 acres (2.03 mi<sup>2</sup> or 5.26 km<sup>2</sup>), which agrees with the published acreage of the sanctuary. Leon Neel helped to pinpoint the location of Kelso's house.

Unfortunately, just as Eastman was seeing his efforts materialize, tragedy struck in his personal life when his wife Anna died in an airplane crash on June 23, 1950.<sup>109</sup> Her plane had disappeared over Lake Michigan, and at the time it was the most serious commercial airline crash in the nation's history. Eastman was devastated and told John Baker he was "in no mood or condition to carry forward this project" and that he should enlist the help of Read, Sprunt Jr, and Kelso to proceed with the sanctuary.<sup>110</sup> One of Eastman's last actions before his temporary departure was to forward to Baker a map of property owners in the area and inform him all he knew about local land ownership,<sup>111</sup> to which Baker replied with his appreciation for being entrusted with the future protection of the birds Eastman had found.<sup>112</sup>

The project to establish the sanctuary was from this point on in the hands of the National Audubon Society.<sup>113</sup> Baker lost no time and quickly asked Kelso to go to the courthouse and retrieve specific details about the landownership in the proposed sanctuary area so that the National Audubon Society could contact the landowners.<sup>114</sup> It didn't take much longer for the sanctuary to near its finalization. *The County Record* ran a front-page article on September 29, 1950 titled "World's Rarest Bird Found Here," which stated that Kelso was appointed as a special warden by the National Audubon Society. Bayard Read had negotiated sanctuary status with the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and with the three landowners, The Neil Lumber and Manufacturing Company, The St Joe Paper Company, and Kelso.<sup>115</sup> On October 2, 1950, the Commission banned guns and hunting in the area, and the following day, October 3, 1950, the National Audubon Society announced that the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, under supervision of warden Muriel Kelso, had been established for the Ivory-bills (Figure 8). In the end, the sanctuary covered an area of 1,300 acres

109 George Eckel, "58 feared lost in crash of airliner in Lake Michigan; hunt proves futile; many from New York area are aboard," *New York Times*, June 25, 1950; "Those Aboard Lost Airliner," *New York Times*, June 25, 1950; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950.

110 Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950. It seems that Alexander Sprunt Jr. did not participate actively in the establishment of the sanctuary.

111 Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, July 6, 1950.

112 John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, July 10, 1950.

113 John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, July 10, 1950; Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Herbert L. Stoddard, July 15, 1950; Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Herbert R. Sass, July 22, 1950.

114 John H. Baker to Muriel L. Kelso, July 10, 1950.

115 "World's rarest bird found here," *The County Record*, September 29, 1950.

(2.03 mi<sup>2</sup> or 5.26 km<sup>2</sup>), smaller than Read's initial proposal but still a significant accomplishment. It would operate on roughly \$2,000 per year, a sum that included an annual salary of \$1,200 for the warden.<sup>116</sup> A substantial portion of these funds came from donations that Whitney Eastman raised amongst a group of contributors.<sup>117</sup>

Ultimately, The National Audubon Society and Bayard Read had managed what had not been accomplished in the Singer Tract: to get landowners, particularly lumber companies, on board to protect an area for Ivory-bills. The news of the Ivory-bill sanctuary was published in newspapers across the country, mentioned in an advertisement with an illustration of an Ivory-bill in *National Geographic Magazine*, and chronicled by John Baker in *Audubon Magazine*, but none of these publications mentioned exactly where the sanctuary was located.<sup>118</sup> However, the sanctuary had been established without definite knowledge of whether Ivory-bills were nesting in the area. Somewhat prophetically, the *St Paul Pioneer Press* concluded its news feature by quoting ornithologist Frank Chapman from 1896: "'The ivory-bill,' writes Mr. Chapman, 'does not remain long in one place.'"<sup>119</sup>

### The Sanctuary and Its Warden

Just after the establishment of the sanctuary, the Blountstown newspaper *The County Record* published a letter to the editor by John Baker in which he said, "We greatly appreciate your interest

116 National Audubon Society, "News Release about the Chipola River wildlife Sanctuary," October 3, 1950; Baker, "News of Wildlife and Conservation," 391; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, October 13, 1950; National Audubon Society, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society," held at Audubon House on April 30, 1952; John H. Baker to Merritt C. Farrar, May 6, 1952; Whitney H. Eastman to Merritt C. Farrar, May 14, 1952.

117 Whitney H. Eastman, "Report to the Contributors to Ivory-bill Sanctuary Fund," April 25, 1951; John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, August 14, 1951; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, May 6, 1952.

118 Baker, "News of Wildlife and Conservation," 391-392; "The woodchopper with the big appetite," *National Geographic Magazine* 99 (May, 1951): 562. For newspaper articles, see e.g. "Rarest U.S. bird found in south; haven is set up," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 3, 1950; "Rarest birds discovered in Florida," *Hartford Courant*, October 3, 1950; "An Ivory-Bill feared extinct, seen in Florida," *New York Herald*, October 3, 1950; "'Extinct' Ivory-billed woodpecker to live in 1,300-acre sanctuary," *New York Times*, October 3, 1950; "1,300-acres are reserved for two rare woodpeckers," *Baltimore Sun*, October 3, 1950.

119 "Woodpecker's friend wins - rare birds get haven," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 3, 1950.

in the establishment of the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary and know that we can count on your cooperation in making the project a success.”<sup>120</sup> There was indeed local support for the newly established Ivory-bill sanctuary, as noted by Eastman, Read, and Herbert Stoddard.<sup>121</sup> Naturally, some also realized that the sanctuary had the potential to bring in revenue to local businesses. Wallace Finlay at *The County Record* argued the region should make every effort to support the sanctuary and its warden and to recognize the benefits in store: “Make no mistake, Friends. These bird lovers are a rare breed. They will be coming in here to see this almost extinct bird. They will be armed with field glasses, instead of shot guns, but they will spend money with us, and carry news of our area to the four points of the compass.”<sup>122</sup>

The sanctuary, however, was not open to visitors, though boats were allowed on the river itself. It fell to its warden Muriel Kelso to make sure that there was no trespassing, firearms, or hunting in the area. In late October 1950, sanctuary posters arrived, and Kelso completed posting these around the perimeter of the sanctuary and on both sides of the river by early November.<sup>123</sup> He was grateful and proud of his new responsibility, and he patrolled the land areas on foot and by car and spent much time on the river checking boats, including fishing boats, for firearms.

Herbert Stoddard was the ornithologist and searcher who spent most time with Kelso. He was very impressed with Kelso’s work as a warden, particularly how he interacted with people. “I have seen a good many wardens in their contacts with the public,” he told John Baker, “and I have never seen one with a better approach.” Stoddard knew that a poor approach could turn dangerous or destructive, be it to Kelso, the birds, or the land. The lumber companies, he opined, must have had full confidence in Kelso as well, since “with the highly combustible pine forests of the whole region, they can take no chances of antagonizing people needlessly.”<sup>124</sup> The fact

120 John Baker, “Letters,” *The County Record*, October 13, 1950.

121 National Audubon Society, “News Release about the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary,” October 3, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to John Baker, March 12, 1951.

122 Wallace Finlay, “Musings,” *The County Record*, October 13, 1950.

123 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” October 24 to October 30, 1950; Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” October 31 to November 6, 1950.

124 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951.

that by June 1951 Stoddard had “heard no shooting, or witnessed devilment of any sort on our visits to the Sanctuary”<sup>125</sup> was a further testament to Kelso’s abilities.

Of course, this success and quiet did not come without risk, for Kelso was several times forced to remove hunters from the area. Indeed, in a span of only two weeks in late 1950, he removed at least six groups of hunters who had entered the sanctuary.<sup>126</sup> The dangers were further punctuated when a fellow wildlife officer and friend of Kelso’s who had helped with some of these evictions, James R. Fields, was tragically shot and killed on Christmas Eve, 1950, when he was trying to catch a suspected poacher in a game refuge close to the sanctuary.<sup>127</sup> Kelso learned about Field’s death on Christmas Day.<sup>128</sup>

Dangers or not, Kelso’s work as a warden meant that he spent a lot of time in the sanctuary. His weekly reports to the National Audubon Society, though, do not contain many descriptions of encounters with birds he identified as Ivory-bills.<sup>129</sup> The extent of his reported encounters in 1950 were two distant auditory encounters on October 12 and 16,<sup>130</sup> a sighting of a pair of Ivory-bills

125 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, June 30, 1951.

126 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” November 21 to November 27 and December 5 to December 12, 1950.

127 “James R. Fields Slain Xmas Eve,” *The County Record*, December 29, 1950.

128 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” December 19 to December 25, 1950.

129 Warden M. L. Kelso’s weekly reports to the National Audubon Society (University of South Florida’s digital collection, Audubon Florida Records, 1900-1970, box 4, folders 14 and 20) cover daily entries between October 10, 1950, to February 26, 1951, March 6, 1951 to March 26, 1951 and May 28, 1951 to June 17, 1951. The reports from June 18, 1951, to October 8, 1951 do not contain daily entries, but instead only three entries on July 16, August 20, and October 8, 1951. The following dates are missing from the reports: February 27, 1951 – March 5, 1951, March 27, 1951 – May 27, 1951, and October 9, 1951, to May 15, 1952 when the sanctuary was closed. In two instances Kelso notes that he has run out of report sheets, on February 5, 1951, and March 26, 1951. In some cases, it is possible to cross reference dates in Kelso’s reports with those noted by others. For example, the arrivals of Robert P. Allen (December 9, 1950) and James T. Tanner (December 18, 1950) as well as Eastman, Baker and Stoddard (March 6, 1951) and Eastman and Stoddard (March 8, 1951) to the sanctuary are correct. However, in one instance, when Kelso and Tanner examined the sanctuary, Kelso gives the date as December 20, 1951, whereas Tanner lists it as December 19, 1951. Another instance is the visit by Margaret and Fred Stearns on February 21, 1951, which Kelso either omitted or lists as March 21, 1951, in his report. It is possible that Kelso filled out his reports in batches and that he therefore got some dates mixed up.

130 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” October 10 to October 17, 1950.

among oaks on November 7,<sup>131</sup> and the sound of what might have been Ivory-bills foraging and excavating new holes on November 28. For the excavating sounds, he claimed he had “the general location but not the exact tree, as yet.”<sup>132</sup>

### Follow-up Searches In Late 1950 And 1951

Kelso’s encounters notwithstanding, with the sanctuary officially established, The National Audubon Society was keen to conduct a follow-up investigation to learn more about the Ivory-bills there. The Society asked ornithologist Robert Porter Allen to do this work.<sup>133</sup> Allen, who worked for the National Audubon Society, had previous experience with Ivory-bills. He had reported seeing Ivory-bills four times in 1936 when he joined Alexander Sprunt Jr. for two follow-up investigations at the Santee Sanctuary in South Carolina.<sup>134</sup> This sanctuary, which was in place between 1936 and 1938, is the only other Ivory-bill sanctuary to have ever existed in the United States.

Allen conducted his investigation at the Chipola between December 9 and 21, 1950. He was joined by James Tanner, at that point a faculty member at the University of Tennessee, for the last four days of the search. They looked and listened for Ivory-bills by foot, car, and boat, examined the habitat, woodpecker feeding sign, and cavities in the sanctuary, and talked to Kelso and various people about Ivory-bills. They also investigated some adjacent areas—including an area close to Iamonia Lake which is located between Scotts Ferry and the Apalachicola River, as well as other locations in the Apalachicola River basin to the south and south-east—to assess the possibility that the birds reported at the sanctuary could have been transient visitors from other areas (Figures 9 and 4).<sup>135</sup> In particular, based on his assessments of the Apalachicola River basin from 1939, Tanner believed only two locations in the

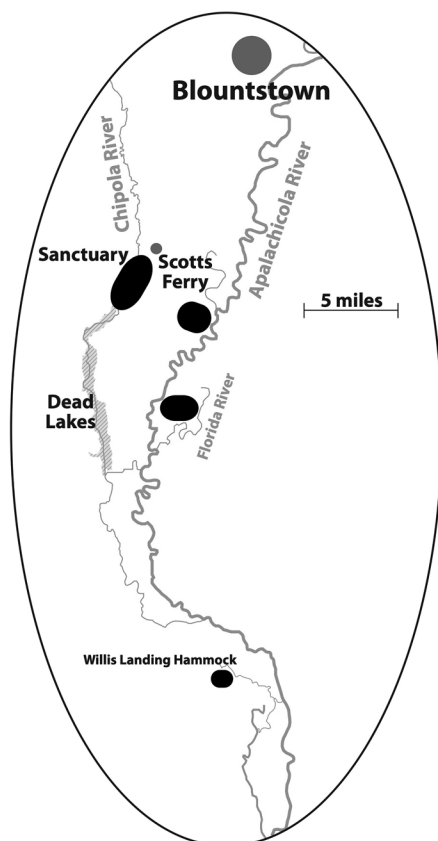
131 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” October 10 to October 17, 1950; Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” November 7 to November 13, 1950.

132 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” November 28 to December 4, 1950.

133 Baker, “News of Wildlife and Conservation,” 391.

134 Fredrik Bryntesson, Robin Cooper, and William C. Hunter, in prep.

135 Robert P. Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker in the Chipola and Apalachicola River areas,” to the National Audubon Society, dated 26 December 1950.



**Figure 9.** The four areas in black show the locations in the Apalachicola River Basin that Robert P. Allen and James T. Tanner investigated during the search between December 9 and 21, 1950.

Apalachicola River basin—that of the Florida River and that of the Willis Landing hammock along the Brothers River—had potential for Ivory-bills.<sup>136</sup>

Afterward, Allen wrote a formal report of the investigations to the National Audubon Society that must have rattled John Baker. It expressed considerable doubts that there were Ivory-bills in the sanctuary, rated the habitat as poor for woodpeckers, let alone Ivory-bills,

<sup>136</sup> Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker”; James T. Tanner, “Chipola – Apalachicola 1950,” Field notes from December 18 – 22, 1950.



and stated that no definite Ivory-bill feeding sign or cavities had been observed. The report pointed out that the sanctuary, which was about two square miles in size, was not large enough to cover the area that a pair of Ivory-bills required. This assumption was based on Tanner's estimate from the Singer Tract that a pair of Ivory-bills needed a range of six square miles. He noted that the hardwood bottomland portion along the river was not very wide and that it did not even cover half of the total sanctuary area. Allen also stated that the Chipola River was a blackwater river, which he associated with sandy soil. Therefore, he thought that the soil conditions were not suitable for producing good bottomland forest in terms of woodpecker habitat.<sup>137</sup>

On top of that, population estimates of Pileated and Red-bellied (*Melanerpes carolinus*) woodpeckers in the sanctuary supported the notion that the habitat was poor for Ivory-bills. Tanner had estimated that there were about 21 pairs of Red-bellied Woodpeckers and 6 pairs of Pileated Woodpeckers per square mile in the Singer Tract. This was much higher than the densities of Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers in the Chipola sanctuary, which were estimated to be 6 and 1 pair respectively per square mile. In other words, as Allen summarized, "in the Chipola area the environment appears to support 71% less Red-bellies and 83% less Pileateds than a typical Ivory-bill habitat," and "The limited size of the Chipola swamp and the unfavorable character of the forest is a combination that makes for poor woodpecker habitat."<sup>138</sup>

The report also emphasized that Allen had not observed definite Ivory-bill feeding sign in the sanctuary. He noted that there was very little bark-scaling, and that which could be found could have been done by Pileated Woodpeckers. Likewise, he was of the opinion that the woodpecker diggings and cavities he had seen in the sanctuary, such as the tree stump photographed by Read (see Figure 6), could also have been done by other woodpeckers than Ivory-bills.<sup>139</sup>

137 Allen, "A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker."

138 Allen, "A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker."

139 Allen, "A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker." Allen wrote about the bark-scaling, "There was absolutely no 'stripping' of dead tops and limbs anywhere within the sanctuary or in potential feeding areas for some miles around... All so-called stripping that was brought to our attention (and there were no outstanding or extensive examples) could quite readily be assigned to the Pileated, which was observed in the area, though not in abundance." Tanner added in his field notes, "There certainly is no fresh sign in any area we visited indicating that the birds are present. The only possibility is that of scaling on pine, this may be solved by watching Pileateds in the pine woods."

Moreover, none of the locals Allen had talked to seemed to know anything of Ivory-bills in the area. Even Roy Hallman, who had supposedly known about the Ivory-bills for five years<sup>140</sup> and who reported seeing a female Ivory-bill close to Blountstown in early 1947, did not provide them with any specific information apart from two possible reports in the southern part of the Apalachicola River Basin.<sup>141</sup>

Ultimately, Allen concluded that “no Ivory-billed Woodpeckers were present in the Chipola region during the period of these investigations (December 9-21, 1950) and the evidence indicates that no birds of this species have been present, at least for any prolonged length of time, over the last several years.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, he dismissed the other areas they had visited in the Apalachicola River basin.<sup>143</sup> James Tanner agreed that Ivory-bills were not present in either locale,<sup>144</sup> maintaining as late as 1989 that “Mr. Kelso and others were seeing Pileateds.”<sup>145</sup> Allen’s report from December 26, 1950 ended with the statement, “There seems to be little hope that the Ivory-bill survives in Florida.”<sup>146</sup>

Yet not everyone was so skeptical. Eastman had underlined Allen’s final line from the report and written in the margins, “Others have said this too – but [the birds] did live – 2 of them on Mar. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1950,”<sup>147</sup> referring to his own earlier sightings at Scotts Ferry in which he still held conviction. Herbert Stoddard too, whom Tanner had communicated with,<sup>148</sup> despite conceding that Pileateds could have made the feeding and nesting sign he had seen, remained optimistic about the presence of Ivory-bills in the area.

140 Alexander Sprunt Jr. to Herbert L. Stoddard, July 15, 1950.

141 Tanner, “Chipola – Apalachicola 1950.”

142 Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker.”

143 Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker.”

144 Tanner, “Chipola – Apalachicola 1950.”

145 James T. Tanner to Jerome Jackson, September 11, 1989.

146 Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker.”

147 Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker.” The fact that Eastman made this comment is testimony to his conviction that he had encountered Ivory-bills at Scotts Ferry. Interestingly, Herbert Stoddard’s copy of the report is different from Eastman’s. It has a few added sections that analyze other regions of Florida. Moreover, Stoddard’s report ends with a few sentences that are not included in Eastman’s copy and the last sentence is different: “Perhaps the only way of digging out Ivory-bill possibilities would be to solicit them by sending material by mail to state wardens, fire control men, woodlands men with the larger lumber companies, well informed sportsmen, etc. Such material might include a simple questionnaire and a simplified picture of the Ivory-bill and Pileated side by side (with a Red-belly alongside for size comparison). Reports might result. Otherwise, there seems to be little hope that the Ivory-bill survives in Florida.”

148 James T. Tanner to Robert P. Allen, December 28, 1950.

John Baker, in response to the conflicting opinions, wanted a second follow-up search to take place to determine the status of Ivory-bills in the sanctuary. He started to organize a search in early March of 1951, and the original plan was for himself, Eastman, and Robert Allen to visit the sanctuary. However, Allen could not fit this into his schedule, and neither could Tanner, so Baker recruited Herbert Stoddard as the third member.<sup>149</sup> Typically humble, Stoddard told Eastman, "[Baker] has arranged for me to 'pinch hit' as best I can. Needless to say, I look forward to seeing you, and to being of any possible assistance."<sup>150</sup> In fact, Stoddard's knowledge about Ivory-bills was very well respected. Robert Allen wrote to Eastman on February 27, 1951, to say that Stoddard's joining was "an ideal arrangement" and that Stoddard was "probably better acquainted with Ivory-bills and their habits in Florida than any living person."<sup>151</sup>

Baker made the purpose of the visit clear to Stoddard: "You are aware of the findings of Bob Allen and Jim Tanner when they visited the area in December. I would say that the principal purpose of our visit March 6-7 (the same week in which Mr. Eastman saw ivory-bills in the area a year ago) is to either verify the existence of one or more of the birds in the area this March, or to satisfy ourselves that they are not there, and that the birds he saw must have been transients. If the latter be our conclusion, it is Mr. Eastman's and my feeling that the sanctuary should be discontinued."<sup>152</sup>

Meanwhile, Kelso had been noting more signs of bark scaling in early January 1951,<sup>153</sup> and another intriguing Ivory-bill report took place on February 21. On that day Fred and Margaret Stearns from the Toledo Naturalists' Association visited the sanctuary. Kelso did not grant them access to the area but agreed for them to join him in his boat as he patrolled the river. During the boat trip, the Stearns reported seeing a pair of Ivory-bills.<sup>154</sup> Margaret

149 John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, February 24, 1951; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, February 24, 1951.

150 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, February 24, 1951.

151 Robert P. Allen to Whitney H. Eastman, February 27, 1951.

152 John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, February 24, 1950.

153 Muriel L. Kelso, "Warden's Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida," January 9 to January 15, 1951.

154 Margaret Stearns to Whitney H. Eastman, April 2, 1951. Kelso did not include that the Stearns had visited the sanctuary on February 21, 1951 in his weekly report. However, he did note that the Stearns had been in the sanctuary in his entry for March 21, 1951, and that they "went on the river" then. It is unclear if the Stearns came back to the sanctuary, or if Kelso put the wrong date in his report. In addition, it would seem that if the Stearns saw the Ivory-bills from

Stearns described the sighting in a letter to Eastman that expressed not only her excitement but also provided a good description of what she saw: "I hardly know how to start this note but I feel I must thank you, more than words can express for the privilege we (my husband and I) had of seeing the ivory-billed woodpeckers Feb. 21... We saw nothing of the birds until on the way back my husband said he saw one in a big cypress. We sat silent for a long while, and suddenly two of them came into the cypress. We were so excited we could hardly believe our eyes, but there they were. What stands out for me is the big black crest of the female, which I clearly saw. My husband got the best view of the male and of the placement of the white different from the pileated."<sup>155</sup> Most notable about this description is the mention of the "big black crest of the female," for the female Ivory-bill is the only woodpecker in the United States that has that field mark, which suggests that the Stearns did indeed see Ivory-bills in the sanctuary. In addition, three days later on February 24, two others, Myron Elliott and Tom Reno, told Kelso that they had seen a pair of Ivory-bills while on the river in the area. Kelso added in his report that this sighting had taken place close to where he thought a nesting tree was located.<sup>156</sup>

Baker, Eastman, and Stoddard then visited the sanctuary on March 6, 1951. The visit included inspections of sanctuary boundaries, reviewing a program in place to produce a few dying trees in order to generate food for Ivory-bills, examining the location in the pine woods where Eastman had noted bark scaling the previous March, and searching for the birds.<sup>157</sup> Additionally, sometime during the visit Baker told Kelso that it was essential for the sanctuary to establish that the birds were nesting there. Kelso did not take

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Kelso's boat, then Kelso should also have seen the birds unless he was not on the boat at the time. However, he does not mention seeing the birds nor that the Stearns had a sighting in his weekly report. Nevertheless, when Eastman visited the area in early March 1951 (either on March 6 or 8), Kelso told him about the sighting the Stearns had as they accompanied Kelso in his boat on his rounds (Whitney H. Eastman to Margaret Stearns, April 5, 1951). Eastman also included a statement in his field notebook from his visit to the sanctuary in March 1951. "Margaret Stearns Toledo Natural Society. Saw Ivory Bills".

155 Margaret Stearns to Whitney H. Eastman, April 2, 1951.

156 Muriel L. Kelso, "Warden's Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida," February 20 to February 26, 1951. Eastman has listed Elliott's name in his fieldnote book from his March 1951 visit to the sanctuary, but he did not provide any information about a sighting.

157 Whitney H. Eastman, "Field Observations 9/23/50 to 4/13/51"; Muriel L. Kelso, "Warden's Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida," March 6 to March 12, 1951; Eastman, "Report to the Contributors."

this well and appears to have lost his temper. Stoddard thought that the reason Kelso reacted in this way was because large areas of the sanctuary were essentially inaccessible for Kelso's boats, and that it therefore would be very difficult for him to locate an active nesting tree to ensure the sanctuary's future.<sup>158</sup>

Baker had to go back to New York for meetings, but Eastman and Stoddard, after spending a day at Stoddard's home, returned to the sanctuary for a second search on March 8. This search, like the one on March 6, did not produce any evidence of Ivory-bills, but it did rule out a potential nesting or roosting tree that Eastman and Stoddard observed a Pileated Woodpecker enter in the late afternoon.<sup>159</sup>

Given the inconclusive results thus far, Baker was pondering what to do with the sanctuary,<sup>160</sup> but a March 12 letter from Stoddard encouraged him to keep it going. Stoddard recommended that Baker should continue the sanctuary until further evidence could be amassed that would shed light on the situation. He pointed out that they should not be surprised that they had not seen the birds during their short visit, and he saw it as "a distinct possibility . . . that the two or more pairs may boil down to one pair with a wide range in the vicinity" and that the birds "had frequented the area to some extent."<sup>161</sup> Baker agreed and decided to maintain the sanctuary "until such time as it may be demonstrated that there are no Ivory-billed woodpeckers either resident or transient there."<sup>162</sup>

A month after Baker, Eastman, and Stoddard's search, John Dennis returned to Scotts Ferry on April 5, 1951, for a third attempt. He afterward reported to Eastman that he "had a very successful visit" in which he "saw one ivorybill about noon, and . . . [later] heard distinctive nasal yank notes given by an ivorybill several times."<sup>163</sup> Eastman included the sighting in an 1958 article that contained a section about the sanctuary,<sup>164</sup> and Stoddard and

158 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, April 7, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951.

159 Whitney H. Eastman, "Field Observations 9/23/50 to 4/13/51"; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, March 12, 1951. Eastman did include in his field notes from March 8: "A double 'bam' close by @ 8.20." There are no further comments in his fieldnotes about this sound. It seems that he did not think too much of it as he did not bring it up in his report after the visit (Eastman, "Report to the Contributors.").

160 John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, March 9, 1951.

161 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, March 12, 1951.

162 John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, March 26, 1951.

163 John V. Dennis to Whitney H. Eastman, November 25, 1951.

164 Eastman, "Ten Year Search," 223.

Baker considered these observations solid as well.<sup>165</sup> However, Dennis would later surprise Eastman and others when in 1967 he published an article in *Audubon Magazine* in which he said that the Ivory-bill he had seen in Texas in 1966 was the first he had laid eyes on in the United States.<sup>166</sup> Upon reading this article, Eastman asked Dennis for an explanation as to why he had not mentioned seeing an Ivory-bill in the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary in April 1951. Dennis responded that he had re-evaluated that sighting and decided that he could not be sure about it because he had initially been "somewhat influenced by Mr. Kelso who shouted out, 'there goes an ivory-bill.'"<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, Dennis maintained that his auditory encounter was a correct identification.<sup>168</sup>

There were also other searches that visited the sanctuary, as well as reports of Ivory-bills in the Apalachicola River basin. For example, Henry Stevenson, Rick West, and William Cross returned to the sanctuary on June 16, 1951, a search that appears to have been unsuccessful in terms of Ivory bills.<sup>169</sup> Ornithologist Samuel Grimes, accompanied by Roy Hallman, visited the sanctuary sometime between April 20-22, 1951, and then he appears to have stopped by the area on June 30, 1951.<sup>170</sup> Grimes later, in 1954, wrote to Eastman and said that he had searched the sanctuary area a few times. He provided encouragement as he told Eastman that he had seen "signs that I felt almost certain were Ivory-bills but we did not see the bird."<sup>171</sup>

### Herbert Stoddard Aand Leon Neel's Searches In 1951

While other searches continued intermittently, one of the more significant developments during the spring of 1951 was that Herbert Stoddard decided to conduct, free of charge, a series of

165 John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 25, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to Henry M. Stevenson, June 14, 1951; John H. Baker to Herbert L. Stoddard, June 27, 1951.

166 John V. Dennis, "The ivory-bill flies still," *Audubon Magazine* 69 (November-December 1967): 39.

167 Whitney H. Eastman to John V. Dennis, November 28, 1967 [this item appears to be a draft letter but it conveys Eastman's surprise]; John V. Dennis to Whitney H. Eastman, December 10, 1967.

168 John V. Dennis to Whitney H. Eastman, December 10, 1967; Dennis, "The Ivory-billed Woodpecker," 79.

169 Muriel L. Kelso, "Warden's Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida," June 11 to June 17, 1951.

170 Samuel A. Grimes to Herbert L. Stoddard, April 26, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to Muriel L. Kelso, June 27, 1951.

171 Samuel A. Grimes to Whitney H. Eastman, February 9, 1954.

follow-up searches in the sanctuary with his young forestry assistant and budding ornithologist, Mr. Leon Neel. The addition of Stoddard meant that the team now had a top-class ornithologist on its roster, which pleased Baker and Eastman greatly. In total, Stoddard and Neel searched the sanctuary four times in the spring and early summer of 1951.<sup>172</sup> These searches indeed provided Stoddard with a wealth of knowledge about the general area, the sanctuary, Kelso, and the status of Ivory-bills in the region.

Stoddard had a clear search strategy: to bring food and then spend all daylight hours searching quietly by foot and canoe. The canoe, he argued, was the choice vessel for such a search since it was quiet and could access areas where boats could not go in the swamp. He also quickly learned that the best days to search the sanctuary were Mondays and Tuesdays when there were fewer motorboats on the river. Stoddard and Neel frequently split up and searched independently of one another to maximize their search effort, and Leon Neel remembered that they slept on the banks of the river during these searches.<sup>173</sup>

Their first search in the sanctuary, March 30 – April 1, seemed promising: they saw a male Bachman's Warbler (*Vermivora bachmani*), an extremely rare species that must have provided some encouragement for special birds (and that, coincidentally, was recently declared extinct in the same USFWS ruling that delayed the decision on the Ivory-bill); Stoddard, after canoeing through the swamp areas, liked what he saw and was further convinced it was suitable Ivory-bill habitat;<sup>174</sup> Neel heard a number of calls that could have been made by an Ivory-bill; and Stoddard, on the final morning, "got a distant flash view of what may well have been an Ivory-bill flying through the cypress tops in the big swamp a half mile below Kelso's house."<sup>175</sup> In addition, Kelso claimed to have had sightings and auditory encounters while Stoddard and Neel were searching.

172 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, June 30, 1950.

173 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, April 7, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to Samuel A. Grimes, May 1, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John V. Dennis, June 9, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, June 30, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to Henry M. Stevenson, September 27, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to George H. Lowery Jr., May 5, 1953; Leon Neel, interview by Fredrik Bryntesson, August 17, 2011.

174 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, April 7, 1951.

175 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, April 7, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951.



But Stoddard was careful not to be overconfident.<sup>176</sup> Given the uncertainty of his own sighting, and since Neel had never before heard Ivory-bills, he did not think that either of these encounters counted “as evidence.”<sup>177</sup> And he noted that Kelso might have identified Ivory-bills by mistake when the birds had been seen at a distance due to his lack of binoculars, and “I suspect that what Kelso calls the high call of the Ivory-bill may actually be that high, unusual call of the Pileated; I have no doubt that he is correct on the USUAL callnotes, which could scarcely be mistaken...”<sup>178</sup> Still, it is noteworthy that all these possible encounters took place only a few days before Dennis reported hearing Ivory-bill calls in the sanctuary on April 5.

Stoddard emphasized to Baker that Kelso must be supplied with both binoculars and a canoe for him to better identify distant birds and to gain access to the more remote areas of the swamp. This was especially important given the Society’s need to establish the exact status of Ivory-bills in the area, and because a potential nesting tree might escape detection if Kelso was unable to see clearly or access the area where it might be located.<sup>179</sup> Eventually,

176 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951. Note that Stoddard expressed specific concern over mistaking Cooper’s Hawk calls with Ivory-billed Woodpeckers (similar to what happened to Tanner during his search in Florida during the 1930s) and that he thought that Pileateds could do single and double-knocks.

177 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951. In 2010 Leon Neel published an account of their searches and stated that neither he nor Stoddard saw or heard Ivory-bills during their searches at the sanctuary (Leon Neel, *The Art of Managing Longleaf: A Personal History of the Stoddard-Neel Approach* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010): 97-98.). However, in a personal conversation with William C. Hunter, Neel did confirm what Stoddard had told Eastman and Baker, that they did have encounters with potential Ivory-bills. However, he also confirmed that there was not enough evidence to claim the reports publicly.

178 Herbert L. Stoddard to Whitney H. Eastman, April 7, 1951. James Tanner had interviewed Kelso in December 1950 and stated that “Many of Kelso’s reports are mistaken, – not deliberately false, but due to ignorance and wishful thinking. There appear to be contradictions in some of his stories. I could not get any clear statement of what Ivory-bills sound like from him. He said that the local name of I-b was ‘Saddleback’ – which appears good but in many ways odd.” (Tanner, “Chipola – Apalachicola 1950.”). As mentioned in the text, Tanner was of the opinion that “Kelso and others were seeing Pileateds.” On the other hand, Eastman, Stevenson, and Stoddard expressed confidence that Kelso could tell Pileated and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers apart (Eastman, “Discovery”; Henry M. Stevenson to James T. Tanner, April 25, 1950; Herbert L. Stoddard to Alexander Sprunt Jr., July 10, 1950.).

179 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker June 30, 1951.



Eastman and the National Audubon Society were able to provide him with both binoculars<sup>180</sup> and a canoe.<sup>181</sup>

There remained, however, a concern that Kelso made some exaggerated statements about the birds. For example, while there were no obvious exaggerations in Kelso's reports to the National Audubon Society, the President of the Tampa Bird Club had told Alexander Sprunt Jr. about a February 1951 letter from Kelso that stated that two pairs of Ivory-bills had nested successfully and reared one female and one male Ivory-bill chick.<sup>182</sup> Since Ivory-bills had not been documented to nest in the sanctuary in 1951, this second-hand rumor naturally made Baker concerned when Sprunt Jr. told him about it.<sup>183</sup> John Dennis later also stated that he thought Kelso exaggerated.<sup>184</sup> Stoddard, who knew Kelso the best and got along well with him, agreed that some of his reports could have been exaggerated or confused because his expertise was reptiles and insects and not ornithology, but he maintained that Kelso was honest and "learning very fast [and] you cannot make an expert in a day..."<sup>185</sup>

Stoddard and Neel's second search, April 19-21, was less successful; they still had not encountered nor seen definitive sign of Ivory-bills, but he noted that they had not yet been able to investigate even fifty percent of the useful habitat in the sanctuary because the swamp areas were difficult to navigate and therefore could not be investigated very quickly. He had also realized by now that the swamp areas in the sanctuary were larger than previously thought,

180 Whitney H. Eastman to Muriel L. Kelso, May 21, 1951.

181 Muriel L. Kelso, "Warden's Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida," August 20 to October 8, 1951.

182 Alexander Sprunt Jr. to John H. Baker, April 4, 1951. Eastman included in his fieldnotes from March 6, 1951, that "Kelso says 3 pr of Ivory Bills nesting here."

183 John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, April 10, 1951; John H. Baker to Alexander Sprunt Jr., April 10, 1951.

184 Dennis, "The Ivory-billed Woodpecker," 79.

185 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951. Stoddard explained to Baker that Kelso, due to lack of experience with ornithology, might have concluded things that "a trained ornithologist would not..."; that "as to what he may tell the bird fans that accompany him on his patrol work, I do not know, but in his enthusiasm, and with the above-mentioned lack of background it may well be a pretty rosy picture"; that "with the sudden interest in the Ivory-bill occasioned by the discovery of Eastman's party, he [Kelso] crammed hard, and maybe made things sound unduly optimistic for a short time"; and that "I consider Kelso a very keen, intelligent man, and think that he will rapidly change his ideas as to the conclusions to be drawn from his observations." James Tanner had a similar opinion based on his conversations with Kelso: "Many of Kelso's reports are mistaken, – not deliberately false, but due to ignorance and wishful thinking" (Tanner, "Chipola – Apalachicola 1950.").

leading him to wonder how much of the remote swamp areas that Allen and Tanner had covered.<sup>186</sup> Accordingly, Stoddard was not discouraged by their findings so far. Perhaps boosted by a sighting of another bird in the sanctuary on April 20—that of a rare Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*)—Stoddard told Samuel Grimes that “one has to have the cooperation of Lady Luck in [seeing Ivory-bills in the Sanctuary]... I believe that there are one or more of the birds in the area for the nesting half of the year.”<sup>187</sup>

Lady Luck, however, did not return. Stoddard and Neel’s third and fourth searches in the sanctuary, May 20-22 and June 17-19, despite being able by that point to cover the sanctuary in relative depth, did not result in any encounters with Ivory-bills. Stoddard was now of the opinion that the birds simply did not appear to be residents there and that the last sighting was likely that of Dennis and Kelso on April 5.<sup>188</sup> Stoddard added, “it seems as though we should have seen or heard the birds had they been present regularly this season... and we are reasonably well satisfied that there are no areas of heavy recent ‘sign’ as one would expect were the birds nesting or using the area heavily for feeding.”<sup>189</sup> Stoddard’s main conclusion was therefore that the Ivory-bills were only transient visitors to the sanctuary area. “[T]he Ivory-bills are no more than part time residents of the area,” he explained to Baker in September 1951. “For at least two summers they have been absent after April to July, until sometime the following winter or early spring.”<sup>190</sup> Eastman, after hearing about Stoddard’s findings, agreed that the birds merely visited the sanctuary from time to time.<sup>191</sup>

186 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 28, 1951.

187 Hebert L. Stoddard to Samuel A. Grimes, May 1, 1951.

188 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker June 30, 1951. The Dennis sighting Stoddard refers to is the one that Dennis later reevaluated as he did not think he had seen enough of the bird to positively identify it. Stoddard told Henry Stevenson in a letter on September 27, “It became apparent that the Ivory-bills were no longer visiting the Chipola Sanctuary regularly... It seems clear from Kelso and others that the birds have been there more or less the past two years in late winter and Spring; this past year however it looks like they are absent from March on through the Summer. Maybe they are erratic in their nesting; present some years and absent in others depending on some varying factor like food supply, etc.” Similarly, Kelso reported to the National Audubon Society in July, 1951, “Mr. Stoddard, and myself have checked this area very close, and have not found any nesting holes being used, and have not seen the birds since we had the wind storm. It is my opinion that the birds, are not using this area this season.” (Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” June 18 to July 16, 1951.).

189 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker June 30, 1951.

190 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker September 24, 1951.

191 Whitney H. Eastman to Herbert L. Stoddard, August 23, 1951.

Stoddard provided at least two hypotheses for why the Ivory-bills did not seem to frequent the sanctuary area. First, he noted that the cold winter in 1950-51 had resulted in very little beetle-killed pine in the area, which meant the food source of beetles was likely diminished, and that there had been no logging operations in the area since the sanctuary was established, resulting in no damaged and dying (but still standing) pines as during previous years.<sup>192</sup> Second, In 1953, Stoddard added that the increased use of motorboats on the Chipola River at Scotts Ferry might have been responsible for "driving the rare woodpeckers from the area."<sup>193</sup>

Stoddard suspected instead that the birds might be found in the Apalachicola River area, east of the sanctuary.<sup>194</sup> He purchased aerial photographs of the area to study<sup>195</sup> and conducted an airplane survey in June 1951. He was impressed and concluded that "The whole setup looks much better from the air than I had expected, as the Swamps have only a narrow strip of pineland between them and that Apalachicola Swamp is BIG."<sup>196</sup> He believed the entire area "is one range, and the birds may spend most of their time in either swamp, as food conditions make desirable."<sup>197</sup> As a result, in the summer of 1951 Stoddard and Neel spent four days doing a preliminary search in the Apalachicola River region. They included the area between Iamonia Lake and the Apalachicola directly opposite the sanctuary, and they also searched along the Florida River to the south. They did not report any positive findings but remained optimistic that Ivory-bills could be present in the larger range.<sup>198</sup>

### The Last Official Search and the Closure of the Sanctuary

As it would turn out, though, there would be no more compelling Ivory-bills encounters in the sanctuary after April 1951. Kelso made no more reports of sightings or sign, and a search in late March 1952—this time by Eastman, his second wife Karen, Stoddard, Neel,

192 Hebert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, June 30, 1951.

193 Herbert L. Stoddard to George H. Lowery, April 22, 1953.

194 Herbert L. Stoddard to John V. Dennis, June 9, 1951.

195 Herbert L. Stoddard to Muriel L. Kelso, June 27, 1951; Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, June 30, 1951. Stoddard told Baker, "I have ordered complete aerial maps of the Chipola Swamp, and across to and including the Apalachicola from upper Dead Lakes to Blountstown, as I consider such essential to any logical approach to the problem."

196 Herbert L. Stoddard to Muriel L. Kelso, June 27, 1951.

197 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker June 30, 1951.

198 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker September 24, 1951.

and Kelso—was unsuccessful.<sup>199</sup> In the wake of the birds' prolonged absence, discussions about whether the sanctuary should be discontinued ensued. Stoddard pointed out to Baker that the finding "forces us to the conclusion that whatever may have been their status in the area during previous years, during the past two they have been little more than intermittent visitors from some other section, probably the nearby Apalachicola River Swamp. And of course, there can be no assurance that they will again become regular in, or even re-visit the Sanctuary set up primarily for them. So I personally can no longer urge you to continue to bear the expense there, though I greatly appreciate your giving us an additional year for further study of the situation."<sup>200</sup> Eastman, who had been the primary catalyst to protect the birds at the start, agreed with the assessment.<sup>201</sup> And so, on April 30, 1952, the Board of the National Audubon Society held a meeting where it was decided that, in light of the findings and financial strain, it could no longer maintain the sanctuary. The Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary was therefore discontinued on May 15, 1952.<sup>202</sup>

The sanctuary had opened and been shuttered, but Stoddard and Eastman argued that the area should still remain protected to some degree as, apart from Ivory-bills that might return, other rare species had been seen there and the fauna had benefited from the refuge status.<sup>203</sup> These pleas, however, were not heeded. There were some discussions that the Florida Audubon Society could take over the management of the sanctuary, although it seemed doubtful that they could have financially been able to do so.<sup>204</sup> At any rate, the Florida Fish and Freshwater Game Commission, since there was no definitive proof of Ivory-bills, denied a request from the National Audubon Society to maintain the protected status of the area. Instead, the Commission restored the acres that made up the sanctuary as open to hunting.<sup>205</sup>

199 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 1, 1952; Whitney H. Eastman and Karen Eastman, "Field Observations by Whitney and Karen Eastman Mar. 13, 1952 to Mar. 31, 52"; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 10, 1952; Eastman, "Report To All Contributors."

200 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 1, 1952.

201 Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 10, 1952.

202 National Audubon Society, "Minutes of the Meeting."

203 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 1, 1952; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 10, 1952.

204 Herbert L. Stoddard to John H. Baker, April 1, 1952; Whitney H. Eastman to John H. Baker, April 10, 1952; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, April 15, 1952; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, May 6, 1952; Merritt C. Farrar to Whitney H. Eastman, May 8, 1952; Whitney H. Eastman to Merritt C. Farrar, May 14, 1952.

205 John H. Baker to Merritt C. Farrar, May 6, 1952; John H. Baker to Whitney H. Eastman, June 13, 1952; "Rare birds disappear from protected area," *St. Petersburg Times*, August 5, 1952.

John Baker was of course disappointed the sanctuary did not accomplish what they all had hoped, but he was nevertheless appreciative to all who had committed the time, resources, energy, and funds to the project. On June 4, Eastman wrote a report to the people who had contributed to his sanctuary fund. He thanked them for their donations and explained the reasons why the sanctuary had closed, though with an undiminished determination to locate the birds: "I am going to continue my search for the Ivory-bills," he wrote, "for I am not yet convinced that this rare species has disappeared completely on this continent."<sup>206</sup>

### Subsequent Searches and Other Encounters

Others, in the decades since the Chipola River sanctuary, have held out hope that the Ivory-bills survive in the Apalachicola River Basin, though conclusive evidence in subsequent searches has remained elusive. In a November 10, 1967, search, for instance, Paul Sykes and Henry Stevenson went northward on the Chipola River by boat from the Dead Lakes, thus covering the area where the sanctuary had been located. Though they identified the habitat as excellent for Ivory-bills, they did not find any signs of the birds.<sup>207</sup> Likewise, a search by Jerome A. Jackson in the late 1980s along the Chipola River found promising habitat, but no compelling evidence of Ivory-bills<sup>208</sup>; and a search between January and July 2007, led by Todd Engstrom, did not generate evidence of Ivory-bills, although areas of good habitat were again identified.<sup>209</sup>

Slightly more intriguing results came from a search by Timothy Spahr and colleagues between January and March 2003, in which they had potential auditory encounters and found some evidence of bark scaling in the southern area of the Apalachicola River Basin. Furthermore, Spahr's interviews with locals produced some good descriptions of birds that could have been Ivory-bills,

<sup>206</sup> Eastman, "Report To All Contributors."

<sup>207</sup> Paul W. Sykes Jr., "Weekly Activities Report - November 6-11, 1967," to the Director, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife; Paul W. Sykes, Jr., "A Personal Perspective on Searching for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker: a 41-year quest," in *The History of Patuxent—America's Wildlife Research Story: U.S. Geological Survey, Circular 1422*, ed. Matthew C. Perry, 171-182, <https://doi.org/10.3133/cir1422>.

<sup>208</sup> Jerome A. Jackson, "Past History, Habitats, and Present Status of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) In North America," *A Final Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* (July 22, 1989): 82-83.

<sup>209</sup> R. Todd Engstrom, "Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) search effort on the Apalachicola and Chipola Rivers in 2007." Report dated 30 July 2007.

including a recent sighting of a bird along the Apalachicola River approximately opposite the old sanctuary area.<sup>210</sup> But again, the results were not definitive.

Additional, albeit unconfirmed, accounts of Ivory-bills in the Apalachicola River region from the early 1950s exist as well. James Fields, the wildlife officer who was murdered in December 1950, had told Robert Allen earlier that month about a possible Ivory-bill sighting by him in the Florida River area, though he was not absolutely sure about the identification<sup>211</sup>; Henry Stevenson noted that around the same time “an experienced forester saw and heard one in another part of the Apalachicola River basin” and that the forester “instantly recognized” the recorded call of an Ivory-bill that Stevenson had played without saying what it was<sup>212</sup>; Eastman learned about a recent sighting of two Ivory-bills in the Florida River area in March 1951<sup>213</sup>; and Kelso reported in October 1951 that a local claimed to have seen a pair of Ivory-bills in a swamp some six miles north of Scotts Ferry.<sup>214</sup>

Another intriguing statement was provided by John K. Terres of the National Audubon Society, who in 1987 wrote that Stoddard in 1955 had told him that Ivory-bills bred in the Apalachicola National Forest, which is located east of the Apalachicola River.<sup>215</sup> It is difficult to assess this statement, but it is of interest since Stoddard was very secretive about his knowledge of Ivory-bills in order to protect the birds. He did not share much with his colleagues and never published anything on the matter apart from briefly mentioning in his autobiography that he had searched for Ivory-bills in Florida, Georgia, and Texas, and that he had “observed three ivorybills in the Southeast in the last fifteen years...”<sup>216</sup> However, we know from archival evidence and Leon Neel that these three Ivory-bills referred to two encounters in Georgia rather than Florida: two

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210 Timothy Spahr, “Searches for Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campyphilus principalis*) in the Apalachicola River Basin of Florida in 2003,” *North American Birds* 59, no. 2 (2005): 210-215.

211 Allen, “A report on the Ivory-billed woodpecker.”

212 Stevenson and Anderson, *Birdlife of Florida*, 408.

213 Whitney H. Eastman, “Field Observations 9/23/50 to 4/13/51.” The source for Eastman’s information was Mr. Calloway, who said that his caretaker had the encounters. He also told Eastman that he had “killed lots of them [Ivory-bills] & lots of Pileateds.”

214 Muriel L. Kelso, “Warden’s Weekly Report Form, National Audubon Society, Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, Florida,” August 20 to October 8, 1951.

215 Terres, “My Greatest Birding Day,” 86.

216 Herbert L. Stoddard, *Memoirs of a Naturalist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 282.

Ivory-bills seen at Ward's Creek, close to Thomasville, most likely in 1951, and then a lone bird seen from an airplane over the Altamaha River basin on June 5, 1953.<sup>217</sup>

Altogether, the relative flurry of reports in the early 1950s at Scotts Ferry and in the early stages of the Chipola River sanctuary seem hard to dismiss. Nevertheless, as late as 1989 Tanner in essence dismissed these reports based on the views he and Robert P Allen had expressed on their December 1950 visit: "There are obvious but unresolvable contradictions between these opinions and the report written by Eastman."<sup>218</sup> In contrast, Tanner in the same document accepted other contemporary reports in north Florida (and if he had known about the specifics of Stoddard's reports, presumably from nearby southwest Georgia; see Figure 2 illustrating the relatively close proximity to the Chipola River): "I believe [the reports] to be valid because of my confidence in the observers and the locations."<sup>219</sup> But Tanner clearly did not believe Kelso's observations, and apparently that lack of confidence extended to Eastman and Stevenson among other equally respected observers. He apparently misunderstood Stoddard's opinion that Ivory-bills were very likely occurring at least as transients along the Chipola River at least during 1950 and 1951.

Regardless of the differences of opinion among observers, the Chipola River reports were unique because they were from the first large-scale search for Ivory-bills after the Singer Tract, and they resulted in the establishment of the only sanctuary for Ivory-bills in the U.S. in the post-Singer Tract era, one of the earliest examples of a modern application of the precautionary principle in the conservation of an endangered species in the U.S.

## Conclusion

All in all, the evidence presented here provides a detailed account of the events that led to the establishment and closure of the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary, and the outcomes are useful in establishing the historical status of Ivory-bills. Further research

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217 Bryntesson, Hunter, and Cox, "Herbert Stoddard's Search," 42-43. It is possible that the encounter at Ward's Creek took place in 1952, as Leon Neel thought it did. However, in the summer of 1952, Stoddard wrote to Henry Stevenson and referred to this sighting as have taken place "just a little over a year ago" (Herbert L. Stoddard to Henry L. Stevenson, July 30, 1952).

218 James T. Tanner, "Annotated Update to Research Report No. 1, October 3, 1989," 30.1.

219 Tanner, "Annotated Update," 30.1.



may uncover additional information about the sanctuary and evidence for Ivory-bills in the area. The archival evidence also provides important insights into the fundamental change of mindset that occurred in the early to mid-1900s, which led to increased awareness for the protection and conservation of both habitat and species. This awareness was especially relevant to the establishment of the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary after the failure to fully protect the Singer Tract.

Interestingly, the Chipola River Sanctuary story also parallels how Ivory-bill sightings and evidence may have contributed to the creation of other protected areas in the states, such as the Congaree National Park in South Carolina and the Big Thicket National Preserve in east Texas. The strongest parallels, though, are with what occurred along the Santee River in South Carolina in the 1930s, the story of the only other Ivory-bill sanctuary in U.S. history. There, initial reports of Ivory-bills in the vicinity of Wadmacoon Island were followed by a sighting and an auditory encounter involving two birds, by ornithologists Alexander Sprunt Jr. and Lester Walsh in May 1935. The actual sanctuary along the Santee River was established in February 1936, and then several subsequent searches until early 1937 resulted in several more encounters with birds identified as Ivory-bills. However, as with the Chipola River sanctuary, efforts along the Santee could not establish a nesting site or whether the birds were resident in the area. By late 1937, the number of Ivory-bill reports in the area had become scarce, and the sanctuary was discontinued in 1938.<sup>220</sup>

The “close calls” of Chipola River sanctuary would also serve as past becoming prologue some fifty years later when, in 2004 and 2005, there were Ivory-bill reports within the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Big Woods of Arkansas.<sup>221</sup> Here, the evidence from sightings, calls, and a video (the latter still considered controversial) indicated at least one male Ivory-bill was present. A

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220 Fredrik Bryntesson, Robin Cooper, and William C. Hunter, in prep. There were also reports of Carolina Parakeets in the area, and these reports undoubtedly influenced the establishment of the sanctuary, though the official Audubon Society records only lists Ivory-bills and Turkey as the species of interest in the sanctuary. See Noel F. R. Snyder, *The Carolina Parakeet, Glimpses of a Vanished Bird* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 61-76. Notable was that while no one at the time questioned that the Ivory-bill reports were valid, there is no firm documentation and very little written detail to describe the sightings; and if the woodpeckers were only occasionally visiting the site. No one seemed to show interest in where the woodpeckers may be breeding.

221 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *Recovery Plan*.

closed area was temporarily established within the Refuge along the Bayou DeView specifically at the time of the public announcement in April 2005. The area involved was open by permit only for limited public use (including searching for the Ivory-bill, but also hunting and fishing). While there were additional reports from the Big Woods during organized searches, no evidence better than that announced in 2005 emerged, and the restricted use designation for Bayou de View soon was lifted. Collectively, the stories of Chipola, Arkansas, and the Santee Sanctuary fit a pattern of many of the searches for the woodpeckers, in which promising encounters with putative Ivory-bills resulted in follow-up searches that failed to establish conclusive evidence for even one individual, let alone a viable population.

Ultimately, the debate about the Ivory-bills continues, with many holding the opinion that the species no longer persists. If the species is still extant, individuals and family groups must have a home range that supersedes specifically protected areas on an annual cycle and from year to year, making establishment of specific sanctuaries moot. Nevertheless, the increasing network of both preserved and managed forests on public and other conservation lands in the Southeast are resulting in older and more diverse forest structure. This trend alone, in part a lasting benefit of the Chipola River sanctuary, leads some to remain hopeful that these forests could support persisting Ivory-bills. And if no Ivory-bills persist, these improving forest conditions will at least serve as a legacy for what has been lost but not forgotten.