

# The Grail Bird:

## Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker

By **Tim Gallagher**, Houghton Mifflin, 2005

Reviewed by **Tom Pawlesh**, Volunteer Photographer

The Carolina Parakeet, the Passenger Pigeon and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker are well known for one reason — each species has become extinct within the last 100 years. But wouldn't it be wonderful if this weren't true? Wouldn't it be wonderful to discover a remnant population of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in a remote southern swamp?

*The Grail Bird* is a true story about finding that needle in the haystack and finding hope for the future — hope that we have not lost this amazing bird, and hope that we may have another chance to secure a suitable habitat for a remarkable species to slowly recover.

In April of 1944, Don Eckelberry, a National Audubon Society artist, documented the last credible sighting of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana. Eckelberry's sighting occurred in a beautiful southern forest called the Singer Tract. Unfortunately, the trees were being clear-cut to build cabinets for Singer sewing machines. As the forest disappeared, so did the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker sightings continued for the next 60 years, but the accounts were largely disregarded. Even experienced naturalists who reported seeing the bird were not taken seriously and were treated like people who reported seeing Big Foot or aliens. Understandably, eyewitnesses were reluctant to talk about their sightings.

However, author Tim Gallagher had hope that the species survived. He was determined to find every person who had a direct experience with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker to prove the skeptics wrong. He read every historical account he could find, and used this knowledge as he headed into the Arkansas swamps with his friend, Bobby Harrison.

While paddling through the bayou, a large woodpecker flew directly in front of them. "Ivory-billed!" they both shouted! Bobby let out a deep sigh. "I saw an Ivory-bill," he said, and then began to cry. What ensued was the largest search ever launched to find a rare bird. Their incredible journey, chronicled in *The Grail Bird*, concluded with the rediscovery of a species believed extinct. Gallagher leaves us with the hope that humans will help, not only with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's survival, but also with the survival of all species.



George M. Sutton/Cornell Lab of Ornithology

### A Century of Extinctions

Worldwide, 50 species of birds have been declared extinct in the past 100 years — on average, one every two years. In the continental United States, six species that have become extinct since 1906 are:

Passenger Pigeon	1914
Carolina Parakeet	1918
<b>Ivory-billed Woodpecker</b>	<b>1944</b>
Eskimo Curlew	1962
Bachman's Warbler	1962
Dusky Seaside Sparrow	1987

**FOUND**