

Help Save the Ivory-billed Woodpecker

By Matt Courtman

My dream is to help save the Ivory-billed Woodpecker from extinction. Also, I am hoping to use our search as a means of generating interest in nature studies here in Northeast Ohio. I am writing to ask for your help in making that dream come true.

The nature education initiative that I am designing is called "BIC," the abbreviated version of the Buckeye Ivorybill Connection. The goal of BIC is to draw Ohio schoolchildren to nature studies through involving them in our active search for the Ivorybill, America's rarest (in fact, it is considered by many to have been extinct since 1944) bird.

Our Ivorybill search (called "Project Coyote") focuses on a remote forest within United States Forest Service land in Louisiana. The name "Project Coyote" is a play on words of the last name of the person, the late Frank Wiley, who originally found Ivorybills in the area several years ago. (The pun refers to "Wile E. Coyote," the nemesis of "Road Runner" in the old Looney Tunes cartoon.)

Mark Michaels has done an excellent job of documenting our search and publishing voluminous, helpful information relating to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (often abbreviated to "IBWO" by researchers) on our website: www.projectcoyoteibwo.com. If you have the interest and the time, I would recommend scrolling through the site to see what catches your eye.

We are confident that we have located an Ivorybill population of unknown size in our search area. The most compelling bits of evidence that we can publish are the audio recordings that we made in March, 2017. As I heard these calls in the field while I was recording, I was as certain as my appropriately-skeptical brain would allow that they were being made by Ivorybills. Since that time, all of my subjective doubt has been erased by subsequent events. For me, the best evidence corroborating the identification as Ivory-billed Woodpecker comes from computer analysis of the calls: the harmonics of our 2017 calls closely match the acoustic dynamics of the only known Ivorybill calls recorded in the 1930s. To listen to our recordings, the best place to go is <https://projectcoyoteibwo.com/2017/12/>.

Except during nesting season, Ivorybills are highly nomadic. An exceptionally strong flyer, the birds range as far as 40 miles a day in search of food. Thus, our recording them (we recorded probably three different Ivorybills) during their putative nesting season is extremely encouraging. During nesting season, Ivorybills generally remain within one mile of their nests. The fact that we recorded them in the same location in two successive nesting seasons (2017 and 2018) reinforces our confidence in having found a resident population of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

Recent events make it extremely important that we objectively establish the continued existence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker as soon as possible. For federal regulatory purposes, the legal status of the Ivorybill is "critically endangered." The United States Forest Service is seeking to change the status to "extinct." The timing of the move seems odd. In our opinion, because a major motivation of the USFS is to serve timber interests, we think that our success with the Ivorybill ON Forest Service land might have

triggered the move: the Ivorybill needs vast amounts of deciduous trees to survive; coniferous trees are more valuable for timber; if the Ivorybill is declared extinct, then the Forest Service can manage “their” forests to favor pine trees over oak and sweet gum trees. If this happens, the Ivorybills, at least in our search area, would be doomed.

While our audio evidence has convinced almost all who have heard it that we HAVE found Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, to prove the matter absolutely, we will have to gather photographic and/or video evidence of Ivorybills. I am thrilled to report that we have made progress in that regard. Attached hereto is a photo from one of our remote cameras that, we think, shows an Ivorybill perched on the side of a tree. The bird (circled in red) clearly shows the back and neck pattern of an Ivorybill. The low resolution of the image, however, is insufficient to constitute “proof” that would halt the Forest Service action.

So, we are in a close race. If we can find an Ivorybill nest before the end of next breeding season (February-May, 2019), we will save the species from extinction. Along those lines, I will spend several days in our search site next month. In addition to moving THE camera closer to the tree upon which the “red-circle” bird was perched, we hope to have adequate funds to purchase additional (and better) remote cameras to also deploy in the relevant area.

While any amount of financial help would be appreciated, I am seeking \$40 from 100 interested persons to fund BIC for the immediate future. (Given our successful track-record so far, if our October expedition produces the anticipated results, we should be able to secure grants from research institutions large enough to sustain our search for the foreseeable future.) Aside from the rosy glow of satisfaction from contributing to an incredibly important cause, you will receive the following benefits from your donation: annual membership in BIC (through October, 2019); a monthly update on BIC’s progress; and, free admittance for you and three others to any BIC-sponsored events.

I am working on the details for most of the BIC events (primarily field trips and seminars). I HAVE already designed the first one: “An Introduction to Bird Identification by Sight and Sound.” For convenience, I am offering this presentation twice. The first will be October 9, 6:30 p.m., in Room A of the North Canton Public Library. The second will be November 8, 6:30 pm., at the University of Akron Field Station which is located within the Bath Nature Preserve. Also, we will live-stream these talks, and make them available for BIC members.

If you REALLY want to help the cause, for a contribution of \$180, I will also conduct a survey of the bird species on whatever piece of property in eastern Ohio or western Pennsylvania that you designate. You can choose the timing of the survey; however, in my experience, early May is the best time in our area, because that would capture both spring migrants AND probable breeding species. This bird survey option makes an excellent Christmas gift.

As for payment, if paying by check, please make it out to Matthew Courtman and put “BIC” in the memo. (I am actively looking for an appropriate nature non-profit to act as a fiduciary partner.) My address is 306 Woodside Avenue NE, North Canton, OH, 44720. Also, here is a link to my PayPal account: paypal.me/ivorybill .