

Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Accomplishments Report 2006



Introduction

On February 11, 2004, kayaker Gene Sparling caught a glimpse of a large and majestic woodpecker in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge of Arkansas. The encounter spurred an extensive scientific search for a species that many feared extinct. Additional sightings and a video from the search have shown that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker may still exist in the Southeastern United States.

Under the leadership of the Secretary of Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and numerous partners launched an ambitious recovery program to bring the Ivory-bill back from the brink of extinction.



Steve Osborne/USFWS

Current Conservation efforts have focused primarily on learning more about the status of the species, distribution and condition of habitat, as well as completing the Draft Recovery Plan. Restoration of bottomland hardwood habitats on public and private land and National Wildlife Refuge land acquisitions have begun and will accelerate as additional information is gained.

Recovery Funds (1113)

Recovery Plan, Team

The Recovery Team Executive Committee, Biology and Habitat Working Groups, and the Steering Committee collaborated on a first draft of the Recovery Plan. This required cooperation of about 70 members.

Communication, coordination, and collaboration are all key to conservation action. Biologists, foresters, managers, and administrators have contributed to these efforts. In 2006, \$ 129,528 was obligated for staff support of recovery planning efforts (attachment 1).

The National Wildlife Refuges in Arkansas, the area of rediscovery, have focused on planning and management that will enhance the survival and recovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Refuges expended funds for activities associated with Recovery Team recommendations, such as habitat inventory and mapping, cavity surveys, modifying forest

management plans, new visitor information kiosks, search effort coordination, and educational outreach.

Search Teams

Arkansas, the area of Ivory-billed Woodpecker rediscovery, remained a focus area for intensive searches. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, The Nature Conservancy, and the Fish and Wildlife Service cooperated to look for this rare and elusive species on the White River and Cache River National Wildlife Refuges.



Colorized digital image of Ivory-billed woodpecker at nest. George M. Sutton/ Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Additional searches were mounted in Florida panhandle (with cooperation from Alabama and led by Auburn University), Congaree National Park in South Carolina, Louisiana, and the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia.

In Fiscal Year 2006, \$442,420 was spent on cooperative search efforts. Search efforts have turned up additional evidence that was thoroughly investigated during the 2007 search season. Surveys in Florida, pending confirmation, potentially indicate additional locations for this species.

Biological Planning

Identification of current and potential habitat is essential for Ivory-billed woodpecker recovery. The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture Office played a key role in developing projects and partnerships to accomplish this key component of conservation. Their work is a model of collaborative development and use of technology, engaging such diverse partners as NASA to use LiDAR remote sensing technology (Laser Vegetation Imaging Sensor—LVIS) to cover 1.2 million acres collecting data on topography, canopy height and cover. This data will be matched with field data generated by the 2005 Habitat Inventory and Assessment and the Forest Community Mapping Project to provide detailed information on forest structure and composition. This allows searchers to more precisely target areas and informs habitat conservation actions for numerous other species.

Projects underway include Foraging Energetics, Habitat Characterization and Decision Support Modeling, Forest Structure and Composition, Cache and Lower White River Mapping, Population Viability Modeling, Web-enabled Forest Management database, Woodpecker Density/Forest Structure and Composition Assessment, Woodboring Beetle Study, Ecological Dynamics of Tree Mortality and Forest Regeneration

Partners included Ducks Unlimited, Louisiana State University, Colorado State University, University of Georgia, University of Maryland, University of Arkansas, USDA Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station and Rocky Mountain Research Station, US Geological Survey, and the National Wetlands Research Center.

In Fiscal Year 2006 approximately \$319,960 was obligated for these efforts.

Recovery Activities

Field and Regional Office Staff supported recovery actions by coordinating searches, analyzing technical information to develop outreach materials, developing partnerships, and providing field assistance. Approximately \$186,066 was used for these activities.

Additional Funds

Conservation Partnerships

A key partner in the efforts to conserve the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Their leadership and training of search teams has been essential support for the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as State coordinated efforts. The Cornell team spent 35,440 hours engaged in search activities in Arkansas, including active and stationary searches, placement of camera and Automatic Recording Units, and volunteer coordination. Private and public sources of funds underwrote this effort.

Natural resource organizations and universities from Texas to Florida and north to Canada sent 60 representatives to Congaree National Park near Columbia, South Carolina, in late August 2006 for the first-ever workshop on finding the elusive Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Workshop participants shared search techniques and

demonstrated equipment, began development of a standardized search methodology, and discussed ways to coordinate the search effort across the Southeast, heard results of recent searches and suggested criteria for future search areas. This historic meeting confirmed the continued commitment to this extraordinary species.

Private Stewardship Grant Program

Partnerships with The Nature Conservancy, Mississippi River Trust and the Audubon Society are underway to restore over 2,500 acres of habitat on private lands in Arkansas, including reforestation of bottomland hardwoods, and foraging habitat enhancement. These projects are being accomplished with \$800,000 in 2005 funds (these grants were accomplished in 2006).

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Focused on bottomland hardwood restoration, seventeen projects in Arkansas and five projects in Louisiana are underway. These projects will improve and increase Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat as well as benefit many other species. Over Fiscal Years 2005-2006 \$1,000,790 was committed to this effort.

Habitat Conservation Planning Program

In 2005, the State of Arkansas received a \$250,250 grant and was successful in competing for a second year in 2006 for \$250,140 to begin a collaborative process for habitat conservation and future decision-making for the Big Woods. Six species will be covered in the plan, including the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

The Big Woods Conservation Partnership is working to restore 200,000 acres in the next 10 years. Brochures, maps, and interpretive displays have been created and distributed by the Service, State partners and other cooperators to improve the public's knowledge and appreciation of the species. Town Hall meetings and coordination with local communities, civic organizations and schools have promoted a positive atmosphere concerning the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Local businesses have benefited from increased tourism and focus on natural resources in the area.

Land Acquisition

Arkansas was awarded \$1 million of Recovery Land Acquisition Funds in 2005 to purchase lands in the Big Woods area. Additional suitable habitat will reduce fragmentation by enlarging blocks of bottomland hardwood and providing corridors between areas of suitable habitat.

In 2005, \$930,647 in Migratory Bird land acquisition funding was redirected to priorities on the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. This was in addition to \$1.4 million previously allocated—these acquisitions benefit waterfowl and a host of other species. In 2006, \$797,000 was used to add needed acreage to the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge.

Additional needs will be identified in the future as populations are located.

Contributions of Other Agencies

Additional funds were pledged to assist in the recovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. USGS allocated \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2005 and \$300,000 in 2006. Additionally, USDA made funds available to focus the Conservation Reserve and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs on habitat Restoration and Improvement for this species and many others. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement program will solicit sign-up of 18,000 acres of bottomland hardwood planting in Arkansas. Wildlife Habitat Improvement (\$1 million) and Wetlands Reserve (\$1.5 million) program funds support habitat improvement and the purchase of development easements.