

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

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The earliest spring arrival for **Swainson's Thrush** is in early April, when it is rare and irregular. It gets rare to uncommon towards the end of April, by early May the numbers pick up and it becomes common to abundant all through the summer. The numbers drop off in September. A little trickle when the bird isn't even regular to almost Thanksgiving. No winter records.

The call note of the Swainson's Thrush sounds like water dropping into a pool. They just call for maybe a week or two before they start singing. Usually don't sing until mid-May, sometimes late May. By June they are singing up a storm, but only in the late afternoon and evening or the early morning. Like all thrushes they are hard to see and they tend to stay in the shade. They are much shyer than Hermit Thrushes.

The song of the **Hermit Thrush** usually starts with a single whistle and then a trill on another note, then again a whistle and a trill on another note. Clear, flutelike notes and then a trill on another note, it doesn't spiral upward the way the Swainson's Thrush does.

The **Purple Finch** has a spiraling song, very fast and very throaty, it doesn't really go up in scale, it is more like a Warbling Vireo at double speed. A lot of Purple Finches are singing now.

**Varied Thrush** sounds different. Sing one note from one side of the syrinx and another from the other side simultaneously. A very ethereal thing that does not spiral. Call a chuck like the call of a Hermit Thrush.

Joe would like everybody to get an **eBird** identity. When you go on his field trips he can share the trip list with you. It is a good way to get started without having to do any work.

Woodpeckers apparently are able to find their food by hearing it. Those grubs are deep inside the trunks most of the time.

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## **Ivory-billed Woodpecker**

It became probably extinct in the US in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There have been some subsequent sightings from Cuba where a different subspecies occurred. However, the habitat in Cuba has been clear cut, so there is really no chance that it persists in Cuba.

The last birds that were thoroughly documented in the US were in old growth forest in the Singer tract in northeastern Louisiana. Tanner, an ornithologist from Cornell, went there to study the birds and he wrote a monograph on them. The tract was clear cut by executive order of Franklin Roosevelt to use the timber and make gun stocks for WW2.

There have been plenty of claims. Most of these lacked credibility. A report from the Pearl River in Mississippi by a Turkey hunter going to Louisiana State University sounded promising. He convinced Van Remsen, the curator at LSU that he had seen a pair. There was a search at the site about a month after the sighting, which had been on April 1<sup>st</sup>. The habitat was not even close to being optimal. It was not far from the road. A lot of it was second growth. There were many

Pileated Woodpeckers there. They perform courtship displays where they chase each other around the tree trunks, which was described for these birds. Subsequently a one month effort to scour the entire area came up empty.

In 2005 it was announced in the news that the species had been found in eastern Arkansas. Cornell had mounted a secret research endeavor after promising reports. One of the researchers set up a video camera on the bow of his boat to photograph whatever it saw. An interesting video was recovered from the boat of a large woodpecker in flight. The analysis of this video indicated that it was an Ivory-billed. What you see is very blurry, a flying large woodpecker with a bold white area on the wing. They wanted better evidence, but somebody had leaked the story and it was going to hit the media. To prevent the thing from getting out of hand they gave a news conference with the Secretary of the Interior indicating that they had conclusive proof that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker still existed in that particular area. A team of blue ribbon ornithologists co-authored a paper that was published online in the journal *Science* describing the video. That was the beginning of the entire fiasco.

Jerome Jackson, a world authority on woodpeckers, did not like the video, he thought it was a Pileated flying away. He later wrote a very even tempered and respectful review of the entire disaster. David Sibley wrote an article giving an alternative explanation of the video, his view was also that it was a Pileated. There was a reply in *Science* by Fitzpatrick, the curator at Cornell, disagreeing with Sibley's analysis. Links to these articles are on Joe's class website.

Two people had an article ready that was supposed to further refute the evidence that this was an Ivory-billed. Cornell University invited them to listen to some recordings that had been made in the swamp. They included vocalizations that sounded very similar to known recordings of actual Ivory-billeds made by Tanner. There is a trumpeting sound that sounds a lot like a nuthatch, very different from the call given by any other kind of woodpecker. It also included double raps which only woodpeckers from the genus *Campephilus* give. Based on this additional information the authors decided to withdraw the further rebuttal paper.

Later the audio material was further analyzed using sonograms. The most compelling sound turned out to be gunfire in the distance. The tooting notes that were recorded were disputed quickly because they sound a lot like an alternate call by the Blue Jay which is very common in that swamp. Other vocalizations were consistent with those given by the White-tailed Deer.

Cornell did a lot of further research and got nothing. Their exit strategy is that there was at least one Ivory-billed that was filmed in that video, but that there isn't one any more.

Within the last month the Secretary of the Interior has announced a habitat recovery plan for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The decision has been criticized because there are so many other species which are critically endangered but are known to still exist.

People are still reporting them. There are people that are obsessed by extremely rare or nearly extinct birds who will devote their entire lives to things like this. Links to two different articles dealing with putative sightings of probably extinct species are on Joe's class website.

*Campephilus* woodpeckers have a different way than other woodpeckers to hold themselves on the tree trunks. They use their ankle joints ("knees"), they rest on the tarsus with their feet outwards. You see splayed out feet with the legs pressed against the tree trunk. The drawing in NatGeo is incorrect.

## **Pileated Woodpecker**

### **OCCURRENCE**

In the west they range southwards into the Sierra Nevada and to the coast of northern CA. Grinnell and Miller in 1944 showed it occurring in the Sierra Nevada and in the coastal mountains south to Sonoma County. They had no records or specimens from Marin County, where it is now well established. (The same is true for Spotted Owl!) They have spread down as far as Santa Cruz County, very scarce there. There is a record from Bayview Hill in SF a few years ago, a one day wonder.

They are very common in the southeast, with densities much higher than elsewhere in places like Texas, Arkansas and Florida, which are exactly the places where Ivory-billed used to occur. In those areas you don't have to go into some big thicket or swamp to see them. They are on telephone poles in parks.

As you get up into the northeast they become more scarce. They may have started in the southeast and then gradually spread northward and then westward through the forests of Canada and only recently south along the west coast where they have occupied the mountains of CA. We have basically monitored a range expansion in CA where they have spread down the coast into Marin, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties and a little bit into Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

They are resident birds that don't travel much. Sometimes there are large forest fires in the west and that seems to cause these birds to disperse away from their breeding territories, away from the fire. Show up in pretty odd places. One was seen recently in Redwood Regional Park in Oakland, which is a locality where they are sporadic, they have occurred there in the past. The best place to look for them is probably Mt Tamalpais. Lake Lagunitas in the Marin watershed is also good. Joe used to do field trips there in March. Audubon Canyon has them.

Fairly large territories.

They often forage fairly low, for example on logs on the ground.

They create a lot of evidence that they are in a place by chopping off large areas of bark. They create nest holes and roosting holes which are quite large and oval in shape.

More often heard than seen, but when you find one it can be quite tolerant of being watched.

### **FIELD MARKS**

Big as a crow.

Males have a red moustacial stripe, females a black.

Both have a red crest, on females it is black at the front.

Long tail.

The bill can look ivory colored!

### **VOCALIZATION**

Call note a whack, whack, whack, whack-whack-whack-ack-ack-ack.

Flickers are very variable in their vocalization, sometimes it is hard to know whether you hear a flicker or a Pileated Woodpecker.