

Birds, Birders & The Big Screen

Three white papers.



Birds, Birders & The Big Screen: Three white papers.



The Allure of The Bird

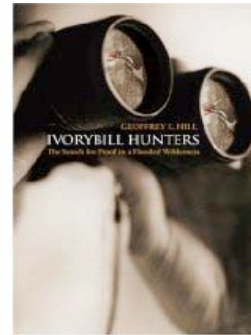
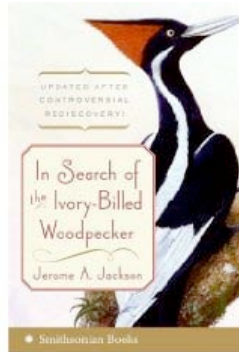
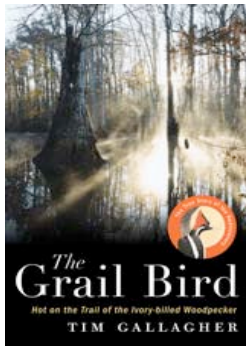
The impact of the Ivory-bill phenomenon.
Includes select Ivory-billography.

Birds on the Big Screen

Bird movies and the 70 million birders who go see them.

Birders Mean Business

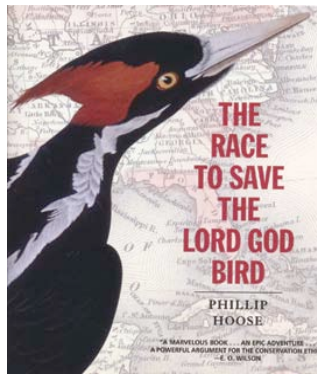
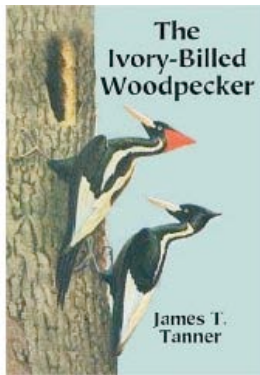
The demographics and market trends of birders.
Includes Birders at a Glance & Birding by State.



The Allure of The Bird

Of all the species America's 50 million birders put on their wish lists, the Ivory-billed woodpecker is the Holy Grail. The 2005 announcement of its existence in Arkansas was widely followed and celebrated throughout the U.S. and the birding community around the world. There was no bigger ornithological news that could have generated such unanimous enthusiasm. Inevitably, the obsession and excitement surrounding the rediscovery and ongoing search has been widely chronicled in books, print, movies, TV and radio.

A flurry of books from leading publishers has recently appeared to feed a public with a seemingly insatiable appetite for the Ivory-bill's story. Author and conservationist Phillip Hoose was first with "*The Race To Save Lord God Bird*" (2004, Farrar, Strous and Giroux). Biologist and Ivory-bill expert Dr. Jerome Jackson summarized his life-long quest for the bird with "*In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*" (2004 Smithsonian Books). Tim Gallagher, editor-in-chief of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine, rushed to press with near perfect timing his personal retelling of the 2005 Arkansas rediscovery in "*The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*" (2005 Houghton Mifflin). Not to be out done by sightings in Arkansas, Auburn University Professor Geoffrey Hill revealed his 2006 rediscovery of possibly several nesting pair in Florida's Panhandle in "*Ivorybill Hunters: The Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness*" (2007, Oxford University Press). In the latest contribution, University of Alabama professor Michael Steinberg reveals his life-long birding passion with "*Stalking The Ghost Bird: The Elusive Ivory-billed woodpecker in Louisiana*" (2008 Louisiana State University Press).



Too numerous to completely list, accounts of the Ivory-bill's rediscovery have appeared in high profile magazines including The New York Times Magazine, Outside Magazine, National Geographic, The New Yorker and even Southwest Airline's in-flight magazine. Similar articles have appeared in every major newspaper with particularly thorough coverage by The New York Times. Special reports on TV have included *Sixty Minutes* and NOVA's *Science Now*.

In the last year, two feature-length films have recently premiered focusing on Ivory-bills. "*Woodpecker*," an undistributed narrative effort by filmmaker Alex Karpovsky, explores fact and fiction in his stylized account which mixes performances by professional actors interacting with the citizens of Brinkley, Arkansas. Also undistributed is "*The Lord God Bird*" from veteran documentarian George Butler ("*Pumping Iron*"). Butler was tapped by Cornell's top-secret expedition to unveil the official version of the rediscovery.

Perhaps most indicative of Cornell's carefully controlled publicity was how it granted National Public Radio a strategic insider scoop featuring pre-recorded field interviews that aired the same day as the 2005 announcement. NPR has continued to give regular and often optimistic updates on the status of the search even without new evidence. Given both the enormous press attention the Ivory-bill continues to attract and Cornell's own successful spinning of the story, even a reputable news agency like NPR has difficulty in the end separating the hope from the hype.



Ivory-billed & Pileated Woodpeckers David Allen Sibley

Select Ivory-bill-ography

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- “Found in Arkansas: Hope on Wings,” James Gorman, *The New York Times*, May 3, 2005
- “Search for Ivory Bill Woodpecker Continues,” (AP) *Associated Press*, December 18, 2005
- “In the Swamp, an 'Extinct' Woodpecker Lives,” James Gorman, *The New York Times*, April 29, 2005
- “Birders Hear Call Linked to Good News on Ivory Bill,” James Gorman, *The New York Times*, August 25, 2005
- “Ivory-Bill 'Knock-Knock' Puts Joke on Skeptics,” James Owen, *National Geographic News*, August 4, 2005
- “Ivory Bill or Not? The Proof Flits Tantalizingly Out of Sight,” James Gorman, *The New York Times*, August 30, 2005
- “In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker; Scientists hope to spot elusive birds again,” Lynne Perri, *USA TODAY*, November 10, 2005
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- “The Thing With Feathers,” Wells Tower, *Outside Magazine*, March 2006
- “13 Ways of Looking at an Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,” Jack Hitt, *The New York Times*, May, 7, 2006



“The Ghost Bird,” Mel White, *National Geographic*, December 2006

“Ivory Bill Report Is Called 'Faith-Based Ornithology',” James Gorman, *The New York Times*, January 24, 2006

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“‘Extinct’ Birds That Are Still Around,” Michael Park, *The Independent*, February 19, 2006

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“Knocking On Wood: Unconfirmed sightings keep ornithologists hopeful of finding bird thought to have been extinct for 50 years,” Richard A. Lovett, *San Diego Tribune*, February 15, 2007

“That Rare Bird Flies Back Into the Picture,” Kathleen Fackelmann; *USA TODAY*, March 15, 2007

“The Ghost Bird,” Jonathan Rosen, *The New Yorker*, May 14, 2001

“Long Extinct, or Just Elusive? Quest begins in swamp for ivory-billed woodpecker,” Kathleen Fackelmann, *USA TODAY*, January 17, 2002

Radio:

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- “Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Rediscovered in Arkansas,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, April 29, 2005
- “The Significance of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, April 29, 2005
- “In Search of Birding's Holy Grail,” National Public Radio, *Talk of the Nation*, May 6, 2005
- “Brinkley, Ark., Embraces 'The Lord God Bird',” National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, July 6, 2005
- “Group Seeks to Debunk Woodpecker Claim,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Christopher Joyce, July 21, 2005
- “Challenge to Woodpecker Discovery Is Dropped,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Christopher Joyce, August 2, 2005
- “Audio Evidence of Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Christopher Joyce, August 25, 2005
- “Tourism Grows Around Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Greg Allen, December 26, 2005
- “Doubt Cast on Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Video,” National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, Christopher Joyce, March 17, 2006

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- “In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker” Dr. Jerome Jackson, 2004
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- “The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker” Tim Gallagher
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- “Ivorybill Hunters: The Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness” Geoffrey Hill,
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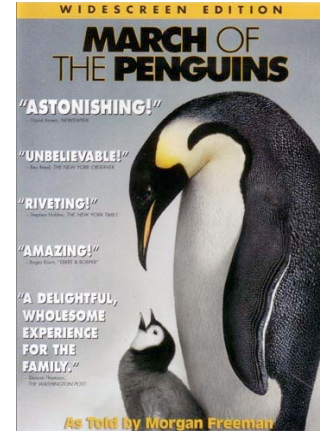
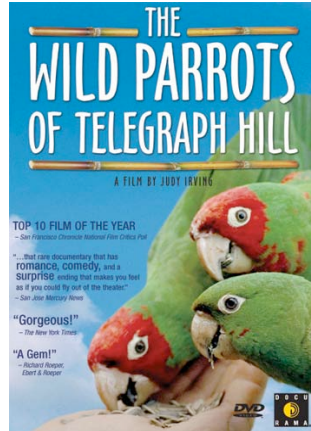
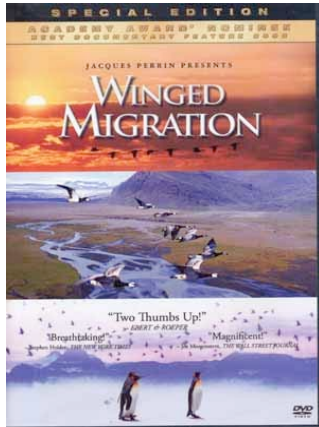
“Stalking The Ghost Bird: The Elusive Ivory-billed woodpecker in Louisiana”
Michael Steinberg, 2008 *Louisiana State University Press*

“Big Woods Bird: An Ivory-bill Story,” Terri Roberts Luneau,
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“The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker,” James T. Tanner, *Dover Publications*;
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Ivory-billed Woodpecker 1830 John James Audubon



Birds on the Big Screen

Recent bird films have ranged from big budget productions like *March of the Penguins* and *Winged Migration* to the shoe-string production *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*. Most moviegoers however, would be hard pressed to name more bird film titles. One reason for this may be that making compelling feature length films about birds is not easy, but it would be a mistake to assume that there is not a big enough audience to support more of them.

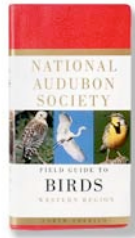
For one thing, the population of people in the US calling themselves birders is growing faster than any other hobby, sport or outdoor constituency and is estimated at 70 million strong*. For another, the self-declared birding demographic is on average between the ages of 40 and 65. Also known as the baby boom generation, this age bracket is the last generation to have gone to see movies in theaters all their lives. They still reliably seek out the cinema for entertainment and in all likelihood will continue to do so, including the approximately 13 million of them who are birders.

For many people, the appeal of birding is in its simplicity; all you need is a pair of binoculars. Nevertheless, birding related sales have grown into a \$30 billion dollar a year market*. Clearly, all this money is being spent on more than just Bushnells and Swarovskis. The main explanation for this spending trend is that birders on average are more affluent and better educated and consequently, have more disposable income than their peers. For those birders who are also baby boomers, this trend is all the more evident as they reach retirement and start to spend more of their time and money satisfying their passion for all things avian. Incidentally, this is equally true in countries like Canada and the UK where there also are large and rapidly growing birding populations.

Because there are so many birders and so few feature films about birds, it goes to follow that the bird films that are released have an enthusiastic and significant theater going audience waiting to buy movie tickets. Consider the impressive success of *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*. Released in the US in 2003, it screened in over 500 theaters nationwide. Relying largely on word of mouth, *Wild Parrots* grew to become the fifth highest grossing documentary of the year and is now ranked among the 30 top nonfiction features ever released. Despite initially receiving mixed reviews and zero Oscar nominations, *Wild Parrots* has since become the third highest grossing nature documentary of all time.

Arguably, the overall success of *Wild Parrots*, and to a degree *Penguins* and *Winged Migration*, has been in its ability to appeal to a wider audience than just birders. However, one cannot overlook the significant role birders played in giving these films the momentum to reach that wider audience. In fact, it is likely that they couldn't have ultimately done so without the birders, all 70 million of them.

*Estimate based upon 20% growth since a 2001 survey by the Us Fish and Wildlife Service.



Birders Mean Business

The following was excerpted and adapted from Us Fish and Wildlife's 2001 survey "*Birding in the United States*," published four years before the 2005 rediscovery announcement, and from USF&WS' "2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation."

"In January 2002 an unprecedented major media event unfolded in a Louisiana swamp. A team of top ornithologists set out to find the ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird last seen in the United States in 1943 and, until a recent credible citing by a turkey hunter, considered extinct in the U.S. The expedition, funded by a corporate sponsor, received worldwide media attention including coverage by the New York Times, USA Today, and National Public Radio."

"This high-profile search for the ivory-billed woodpecker is just one indicator of the growing popularization of birds and birding. Other evidence abounds. A field guide, Sibley's Guide to Birds, became a New York Times bestseller. And a quick search of the internet yields numerous birding sites, some of which list hundreds of birding festivals held around the country each year. " [The 2002 expedition ended empty-handed.]

"Bird watching is now a hobby of **47 Million** Americans*. Tourism officials attribute this in part to a graying population since 13 million of them are baby boomers. While they may not need expensive equipment, these older birders have money to spend with 40 percent living in households earning \$100,000 or more annually. In 2006 alone American birders spent **\$32 Billion** in retail sales. Spending trends look likely to continue with expenditures for wildlife watching having increased a full 21 percent from 1996 to 2006."

"This growing awareness of birding comes at an odd time; birds are in jeopardy. Almost one-in-four bird species in the United States show significant negative trend estimates (Sauer et al. 2003). This decline is attributed primarily to the degradation and destruction of habitat resulting from human population

growth and short-sighted environmental practices such as the razing of wetlands needed by migratory birds. Although there is a certain irony in people becoming enthusiastic about birds as they disappear, it also presents an opportunity: birders may be the economic and political force that can help save the birds.”

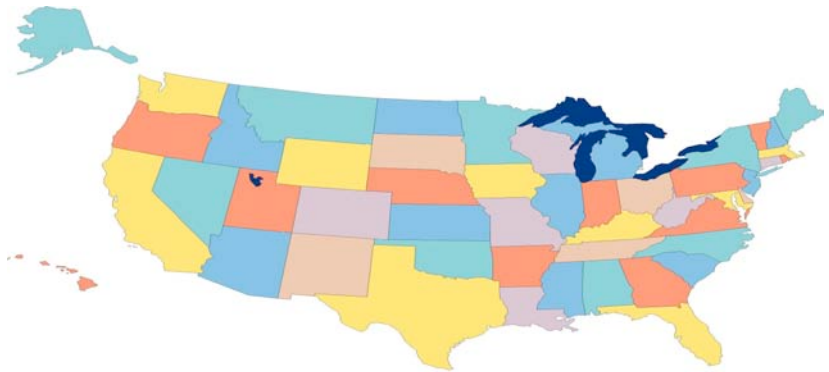


Birders at a Glance

- **50 Million*** US birders, or one in five people
- **\$32 Billion** is what birders spent in 2006 on retail sales
- **13 Million** is how many birders are baby-boomers
- * Birders tend to be better educated
- The average birder has a better than average income
- Just over half are female & married

*“Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis Addendum to the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation,” U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. **“2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation,” U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.**

* The 2009 estimate is closer to 70 million.



Powered by the Geographic Resources Lab
University of Alabama

Birding by State

(measured by the percent of state residents participating)

State	%	Pop.
Montana	44%	945,000
Vermont	43%	624,000
Wisconsin	41%	5,557,000
Washington	36%	6,396,000
Minnesota	36%	5,167,000
Maine	36%	1,322,000
Alaska	36%	670,000
Kentucky	35%	4,206,000
Oregon	35%	3,701,000
New Hampshire	34%	1,315,000
Wyoming	34%	515,000
Iowa	34%	2,982,000
South Dakota	33%	636,000
Idaho	29%	1,466,000
Indiana	29%	6,314,000
New Mexico	28%	1,955,000
Virginia	28%	7,643,000
Utah	27%	2,550,000
Oklahoma	27%	3,579,000
Pennsylvania	27%	12,441,000
Missouri	26%	5,843,000
Colorado	25%	4,753,000
Tennessee	25%	6,039,000

Nebraska	25%	1,768,000
Connecticut	25%	3,505,000
West Virginia	24%	1,818,000
Arkansas	24%	2,811,000
Kansas	24%	2,764,000
Michigan	23%	10,096,000
Maryland	22%	5,616,000
Arizona	22%	6,166,000
Massachusetts	22%	6,437,000
South Carolina	20%	4,321,000
Ohio	20%	11,478,000
Rhode Island	19%	1,068,000
North Carolina	18%	8,857,000
Illinois	18%	12,832,000
New Jersey	18%	8,725,000
Delaware	18%	853,000
Mississippi	18%	2,911,000
Alabama	18%	4,599,000
North Dakota	17%	636,000
New York	17%	19,306,000
Florida	16%	18,090,000
Louisiana	16%	4,288,000
Georgia	15%	9,364,000
Nevada	15%	2,496,000
Texas	14%	23,508,000
California	14%	36,458,000
Hawaii	9%	1,285,000

