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## Robotic Cameras help Naturalists Locate Ivory-Billed Woodpecker

by Shubha Krishnappa - February 19, 2007 - 0 comments

Naturalists will now take help of robots to find the evidence of the ivory-billed woodpecker that was thought to be extinct for more than half a century, reviving hope of the survival of the large and spectacularly marked bird, with its characteristic white beak and red crest.

### Ivory billed woodpecker

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Computer scientists from the [University of California](#), Berkeley and Texas A&M University have developed a high-resolution intelligent robotic video [system](#) to help natural scientists find the rare ivory-billed woodpecker.

The robot, called Automated Collaborative Observatory for Natural Environments (ACONE), is developed by the computer scientists including Dr. Dezheng Song, assistant professor in Texas A&M's Department of [Computer Science](#), and Dr. Kenneth Y. Goldberg, professor in UC Berkeley's departments of [Electrical Engineering](#) and Computer Sciences, and Industrial Engineering and Operations Research, to scan the skies near Brinkley, Arkansas, for birds.

[Researchers](#) have installed the two robotic video cameras in the Bayou DeView area of the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas to keep vigil for the ivory-billed woodpecker in its historic habitat, the bottomland forests of the southeast United States.

The robot [video cameras](#) are part of a new project, called Collaborative Observatories for Natural Environments (CONE), and funded by the National Science Foundation to create automated observatories that can capture natural behavior in remote settings, helping natural scientists from [Cornell University's](#) Laboratory of Ornithology and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission capture conclusive evidence the ivory-billed woodpecker still exists.

"Our idea is that robots can be useful for advancing science," said University of California Berkeley professor Ken Goldberg. He was addressing the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in [San Francisco](#).

Mounted on a power line and pointed toward the sky, the cameras are set with a set of coded working instructions to observe only "bird flight" movement, removing false [readings](#) from clouds and other objects. "The challenge is to develop [software](#) that can throw out anything that is not a bird image," Goldberg said.

The robotic [cameras](#), one pointing east and one pointing west, are connected to a computer that processes the data. They together record 22 frames per second with about two to three megapixels per frame, so any image should be [sharp](#) enough to enable scientists to make a conclusive identification should an ivory bill fly overhead.

However, they keep only a tiny fraction of recorded footage.

Standing nearly 18 to 20 inches tall with a wingspan of about 30 to 31 inches, the ivory-billed woodpecker, sometimes known as the Lord God bird was thought to be the largest woodpecker in North America. The bird had last been spotted in 1944 before a possible sighting of a bird with its markings was reported in the Cache River national wildlife reserve, in Arkansas, in February 2004.

However, some experts who have seen the video footage say it could be showing a pileated woodpecker, a similar-looking bird that is fairly common.

While the images of mysterious ivory-billed woodpecker has yet to be capture, the cameras have already picked up several good images of other birds, a red-tailed hawk, a flock of [Canada](#) geese, and a blue heron.

Goldberg presented initial samples from this video system on Saturday, Feb. 17, at a news briefing on the future of [robotics](#) at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in San Francisco.

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