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## Wild Center Naturalist Leah Filo Returns from Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Search

NATIONAL EFFORT TO LOCATE “GRAIL BIRD”

TUPPER LAKE, New York (February 20, 2007) – Leah Filo, a staff naturalist with the Wild Center/Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks, Tupper Lake, New York, recently returned from a two-week trip in search of the elusive Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the swamps of Arkansas.

The primary sponsors of the search in Arkansas’ White River National Wildlife Refuge are the world-renowned **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** and **The Nature Conservancy**. The largest woodpecker north of Mexico and the third largest in the world, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker inhabits mature swampy forests. Although probably never common, by the 1930s, nearly all of Ivory-billed Woodpecker’s habitat had been destroyed. Since then, Ivory-billed Woodpeckers have been on the verge of extinction. There have been several sightings of this rare bird, and since the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker was announced on April 28, 2005, hundreds of stories have been published about the dramatic rediscovery, the intriguing evidence, and the ongoing search.

Filo was selected for this prestigious assignment due to her credentials as a wildlife biologist. Filo holds a bachelor of science in biology and the environment from the State University of New York at Geneseo. While in Geneseo, she had her first professional experience working as a wildlife biologist at a local nature park. From there, she went on to graduate studies at Antioch University New England, where she focused on migratory songbird research, bird banding, breeding bird surveys and teaching about birds.

For the Ivory-billed Woodpecker search, Filo arrived in Arkansas on January 15, and set up camp in a duck lodge along with nine other volunteers and five permanent paid staff. “It was so exciting to be with such a dynamic group of individuals, who have diverse educational and professional backgrounds. In fact, there was a father/daughter team on the search, and when not volunteering for Ivory-billed Woodpecker hunting, the father was a retired tool maker who instilled the love of birding upon his daughter at an early age,” said Filo.

Each volunteer was equipped with the necessary field gear to endure temperatures that plummeted daily below 30°F in the Arkansas swamp. Although it was cold, the lack of leaves on the trees and bugs in the swamp helped volunteers have better visibility for possible Ivory-billed Woodpecker sightings. Volunteers were also given global positioning satellite devices, digital cameras, and cell phones.

The volunteers were alone most of the day, looking for a variety of signs of the mysterious bird’s existence. “The objectives for a typical day included sighting specific bark scaling on trees, or looking for cavities where the Ivory-billed Woodpecker might nest and rate them based on their size and shape,” said Filo. “For instance, Ivory-billed Woodpeckers traditionally carve out a more asymmetrical cavity for roosting than other

woodpeckers. Based on the A, B and C rating system – with ‘A’ indicating a large, irregular shape similar to an Ivory-billed Woodpecker cavity -- I spotted an ‘A’ cavity. This was a magnificent and unusual find.”

The next day, Filo and other team members returned to the ‘A’ cavity and other suspect cavities and equipped them each with time-lapsed cameras. “The average Ivory-billed Woodpecker sighting lasts about five seconds, so it only makes sense to use modern technology to try and capture evidence of this elusive bird’s existence in this challenging environment,” said Filo.

Filo’s Ivory-billed Woodpecker search ended on January 29, and since she has returned to the Wild Center loaded with endless stories, photographs and a digital diary she kept of her adventures in the Arkansas swamp, along with a list of other wildlife she spotted. For additional information on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Ivory-billed Woodpecker search, visit <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/ivory>.

When asked what the most exciting part of her trip was, Filo indicated that, “my heart raced when I saw another woodpecker because I thought it could be the Ivory-billed. It was actually a red-headed woodpecker, and although it was smaller than an Ivory-billed, from a distance it had similar field marks.”

The Wild Center mixes the indoor and outdoors, live and digital, in unusual ways. There are waterfalls inside, and exhibit labels in the woods outside. Hiking trails outside the Wild Center are like museum exhibit halls, except they are in the forest, with labels that trained staff can change daily. The live otters mix with the splashing cascade of falling water from a trout-filled stream. Films from field scientists doing research in the Adirondacks showcase the world that surrounds the Museum.

EDITOR NOTE: To explore the digital images from Filo’s trip, visit [www.wildcenter.org/pressphotos.html](http://www.wildcenter.org/pressphotos.html).

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