

Are They Ivory-bills?



First things first: No human beings were present when these birds flew over, and there are no other photos of these three birds. What you see is what you get. In other words, there is no “correct” answer to this quiz in the usual sense of a *Birding* Photo Quiz.

But that shouldn't stop us from asking what these three birds are, and, sure enough, *Birding* received quite a number of responses. Sixteen respondents guessed that these birds are some sort of waterbird, with speculation ranging from ducks to Anhinga to ibises to ardeids to shorebirds. Eleven respondents focused instead on a large woodpecker, either Pileated or Ivory-billed. Other guesses included Cuban Parakeet and European Starling, and several respondents concluded that the birds in the photo simply cannot be identified.

Respondents' guesses are presented here more-or-less in checklist sequence. (Given the understandably equivocal nature of some of the responses, strict adherence to checklist sequence is not possible.) Due to the heavy volume of responses, not all of them could be reproduced in the print version of *Birding*. Please see the *Birding* WebExtra <aba.org/pubs/birding/archives/vol39no5p74w1.pdf> for the entire battery of guesses.

The responses have emphatically *not* received the aggressive editorial treatment that submissions for *Birding* normally do. We strongly believe that it is in the spirit of this unusual Photo Quiz to preserve authorial voice as faithfully as possible. Therefore, we have edited only for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and house style—and a couple of instances of syntax gone haywire.

Many thanks to all of the participants who played the Photo Quiz. The staff at *Birding* are grateful for and impressed by the volume of responses—especially given the ridiculously short turnaround time that we had to impose. It is encouraging to know that so many birders are so eager to share their insights, wisdom, and wild speculations. Finally, we note that every single one of the responses is civil and non-psychotic, despite what you may have come to believe about “The Great Ivory-bill Debate”.

— Ted Floyd, Christopher L. Wood, Noah K. Strycker, Macklin Smith, and Geoffrey E. Hill

I say they are **Wood Ducks**. The two lower birds seem to be “setting” their wings; they are long-tailed; the habitat is right; and I always opt for “what should be here”. The upper bird doesn’t look quite right...but...oh, well.

— **Dennis Shepler**
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Three ducks a-quacking or is it a-clapping? All three birds give me the strong impression of medium-sized ducks flying from bottom right to top left, especially the lower bird. If orientation is correct, then the tail (and/or foot extension) looks long, suggesting **Wood Duck** or possibly **Northern Pintail**. The angular wings would be consistent with either. I don’t think any meaningful statements can be made about color because of the poor resolution of this highly pixelated image; perception of tone is more likely an image artifact than real. This artifact would also limit the usefulness of calculating body proportions.

— **Angus Wilson**
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I suspect we are being used to assess the value of the camera system as it might apply to the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. But here is my guess: My first impression is that the birds are dabbling ducks, perhaps **Mallards**. The bird with the strongest “jizz” is at the lower right.

Manipulating and enlarging the image results in maybe seeing some details. The tails seem long and the lower two might be showing shorebird-like legs. I think the long tails are due to a finite exposure time and the birds’ movement. The same two birds also suggest a longish upturned bill like a shorebird.

I feel this image would not stand up for much with our bird records committee. If I had the appropriate licenses and waterfowl season was on, I would probably take the shot... Mallards... (Or close kin...)

— **Michael Schwitters**
CHOTEAU, MONTANA

I think these birds are three **Mallards** with their wings set for a descent into the flooded timber. The lower right bird has the classic bowed wings of a spilling waterfowl, and the aspect of the other two birds says they are gliding as well. Note too the deep breasts of these birds. I think there is a bit of an aberration in the photo where it appears the necks are a bit shortened and the rumps are appearing dark, fat, and slightly elongated. This blurring comes from photographing moving objects with inadequate exposures. (My

family’s photo albums have more than a few old pictures with this effect!)

— **Bill Sheehan**
WOODLAND, MAINE

It’s a long shot for the Choctawhatchee birds, but they look like **Northern Gannets** or **boobies** to me. I sure hope you were not expecting exact species. Of course, I know that they would be out of their ranges, but there you go.

— **James Roper**
CURITIBA, BRAZIL

My first impression was that these birds are Pileated Woodpeckers, probably because the scenery reminds me of all the swamp shots taken by Ivory-billed Woodpecker searchers. However, these birds seem to be more gliders, whereas woodpeckers are more swooping.

So looking more closely at the shape, and knowing that we are in Florida, and in a swamp, I come to a short list that includes Double Crested Cormorant, ibises, and **Anhinga**. I briefly tried to make the bird at top into a Great Blue Heron, but the wings on the other two talked me out of it. Likewise, the wings seem wrong for an ibis. Cormorant is tempting, but for my money I’d have to go with **Anhinga**. Funny fliers those **Anhingas**: flap, flap, glide... flap, flap, glide... They also have that dart-like profile.

— **Peter Burke**
PEAPACK, NEW JERSEY

I think the three birds in the photo are **Anhingas**.

— **Mary Ulmer**
FRANKLINTON, LOUISIANA

I think that the photo shows two different species. The upper bird is one species, and the two back ones are a different species.

The upper one looks like an **Anhinga**. It looks bigger than the back two birds. It seems to be in a glide—typical of the species. The wings of the bird also seem to be long and skinny. But they are also wide from base to tip. The tail seems to be long and skinny as well. The head looks to be very pointed at the end. **Anhingas** have a long pointed bill, so this shape would be evident in flight.

The back two birds look smaller than the upper bird. The wings look shorter and slightly more pointed than the upper bird. **Anhingas** tend to glide a lot and these birds seem to be flapping more. Since they are in a flap that could make the wings look a little pointed. I think that these

other two birds are **Glossy Ibises**. Glossy Ibises are about ten inches shorter than Anhingas—consistent with what we’re seeing in the photo. The front (head and bill) area of these birds look short but with a thin bill that is short. That should fit what ibis look like. Glossy Ibis has a long thin bill, but it is curved, so that is why it could look shorter-billed. The tail and legs look short but long at the same time. The tail looks short as on Glossy Ibis. It looks to have a longer skinny area behind the tail area. Those would be the long legs of an ibis.

— **Seth Cutright**
SAUKVILLE, WISCONSIN

I think the three birds in the Photo Quiz flying above the forest near the Choctawhatchee River are probably **White Ibises** or possibly Glossy Ibises (although they look too light for that species) or Roseate Spoonbills (although the Choctawhatchee River is a bit out of their usual range). They are flying toward the camera, by the way.

— **Jan Swart**
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

Looking at the photo in question, I thought perhaps that the birds were fall-migrant **American Bitterns**. All three look heron-like and rather stocky-chested, and the top bird especially has that “jizz” of a flying bittern. The head and neck look compact, the bird is barrel-chested, and there seems to be an extension of the feet behind the body that is slightly visible. Perhaps these birds were headed to reedy marshes near the river or on to the Gulf of Mexico and then their Mexican wintering grounds.

— **Robert Lane**
CHANDLER, ARIZONA

I think they are **Cattle Egrets**. They are flying away from the camera, that is, toward the bottom of the image. On the middle bird in particular, you can see the bunched-up neck typical of herons and the bill protruding beyond it. On this bird and on the bottom bird the toes sticking out beyond the tail are most obvious. Finally, it seems pretty clear that they are white. The legs don’t protrude far enough for Snowy Egret, and the wings are too translucent and narrow for Black-crowned Night-Heron.

— **Richard C. Hoyer**
TUCSON, ARIZONA

We have three birds with long, pointed bills, and with legs extending beyond the tail. They are flying in the same di-

rection and at the same altitude. The body color is dark and the pattern on the wing is difficult to see but is not a solid tone. The wings are an upside-down U-shape on the down stroke and seem to keep a slight downward bow at the mid-point (even with body.) The wing is longer than the length of the body.

Birds that are this shape and fly in small groups are herons or bitterns. The birds look slim and not chunky. The neck does not extend out far from the body or look tucked in much. These last points eliminate the night-herons, which are chunky birds, as well as the large herons on which the tucked-in neck is obvious. The body color is too dark for Least Bittern, and the wing-to-body ratio is nearly even on that species—unlike the birds in this photo. American Bittern is possible, as the wing-to-body ratio is correct, but they are not often seen flying in groups, and the breast on these birds is too dark for that species and the underwing pattern seems wrong.

Green Herons will fly in groups, and they have long pointed bills and legs that extend beyond the tail. They have the correct wing-to-body length ratio. The body color seems good, and the dark/light/dark pattern from leading edge to trailing edge seems correct.

My guess is **Green Heron**.

— **Donna-Rose Smith**
TORRINGTON, CONNECTICUT

I was struck by the possibility that what we are actually seeing are three birds pointed in the opposite direction from what one might first believe. If that is the case and if the birds also happen to be at an odd angle, is it possible that they are egrets? I’m not making a strong point one way or the other, but I could see them being **Green Herons** or **Great Egrets**.

— **Michael Graff**
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The three birds, all similar in size and shape, look related. The pixel size shows little, just body shape, and direction—flying up the page. The bodies seem pointed at both ends, but that may not be true. The points are not smooth lines. The long pointed bill is above the body axis, eliminating woodpeckers. The rear projection may not be a tail with white spots on the side; more likely, the tail is short and it is the feet projecting beyond the tail that gives the long tapered look. The leftmost bird seems to have more leg projection than the other two (as does Yellow-crowned Night Heron compared to Black-crowned). The shape of the body

along the mid-sagittal section seems to be folded at the neck, a feature that separates cranes from herons.

Three heron species that would have the basic proportions shown are Green Heron and the two night-herons. Although Black-crowned Night-Heron is the common winter resident and the other two species generally leave Florida before November, all three species have been recorded in the panhandle in winter. Least Bittern is even less likely in winter in the panhandle than the other three herons mentioned. The illusion of an upturned bill (on the left bird) would result from the light crown and the dark face and bill above the folded neck on an adult Yellow-crowned. The other two birds with less leg projection are likely the default species: Black-crowned Night-Herons would account for the thicker look of the head on those two individuals. Therefore, my guess for the Photo Quiz is a single adult **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** and two immature or adult **Black-crowned Night-Herons**.

— **John Fulton**
LOS BANOS, CALIFORNIA

How about **Marbled Godwit**?

— **Keith Brady**
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

My guess is that these birds are **Wilson's Snipes**. I first tried to think of birds that could be flying over a Florida swamp together in November. Although the image is poor, the shape is wrong for ducks and songbirds, and the lack of obvious legs rules out herons. Shape—especially the short tail and pointed wings—and the depth of the wing beats suggests to me a shorebird. The image does not show a snipe-length bill, but it does show some amount of the bill, suggesting that the bill must be pretty long. I would not expect most shorebirds to be flying over woods, but Wilson's Snipe might.

— **Paul Sunby**
AUSTIN, TEXAS

I believe these three birds are **Cuban Parakeets** (*Aratinga euops*). Hurricane Dennis in July 2005 blew through one of the areas that these birds inhabit, the Zapata Peninsula, Cuba. When Dennis hit the spine of Cuba it slowed to a Category 1 storm but then intensified to a Category 4. Dennis is considered the worst hurricane to strike Cuba since Flora in the 1963 season. Dennis at landfall at Santa Rosa Island, Florida, had slowed to a Category 3 but was still strong enough to entrain large numbers of terns, notably Sooty and Bridled, along with Brown Noddies, and an as-

tonishing Audubon's Shearwater in Tennessee. Santa Rosa Island is 25 miles from the Choctawhatchee River. Tropical Hurricanes are a one-way ride.

Or these three birds could be a long-lost remnant population of Carolina Parakeets. Carolina Parakeets have not been seen in at least 70 years and are presumed extinct. Nevertheless, the Choctawhatchee basin was considered a likely place for Ivory-billed Woodpecker, which is why I am guessing that this camera was placed there. Instead of getting a photograph of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, it caught an image of another "extinct" bird! The ornithologist Charles Bendire described the bird's flight as more or less undulating, resembling both Passenger Pigeons and falcons.

Or these three birds are one of a number of exotic psittacines flying wild in Florida. Most likely is the Black-hooded Parakeet (*Nandayus nenday*). According to Florida's Breeding Bird Atlas, and unlike most other exotics in Florida, these parakeets have been seen in native woods far from developed areas. The possibility of confusing Carolina Parakeets with feral exotics was an issue raised for reports in Florida in the 1920s of Carolina Parakeet and in South Carolina in the 1930s.

— **Mark Brown**
—SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA

The three birds in flight, along with the two on the tree, are *Dryocopus* woodpeckers. Due to the location, one must ask if these could possibly be Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. Visitors have been unable to report more than one or two Ivory-bills, but since this shot was taken by an automated time-lapse camera, possibly this could have captured a family group late in the season.

I have a reproduction of a 1937 James Tanner Ivory-bill photo published by The Nature Conservancy in the fall of 2002. Although that photo is a silhouette shot, the white band on the male's wings are obvious, as is the breadth of the wings, which come out to almost one-third of the body length. The length of the outstretched wings is greater than the length of the bird.

I copied your shot and sharpened and enhanced it in PhotoShop. None of these birds shows a white band on the wings, and the wings appear too short to be those of Ivory-bill. Also, though the exact size of these birds is difficult to judge, they do not fit the "great size" usually ascribed to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Therefore, I judge these birds to be **Pileated Woodpeckers**.

— **Ruth Troetschler**
LOS ALTOS, CALIFORNIA

The location and shape of these birds immediately brought Ivory-billed Woodpeckers to mind. The wing shapes in three phases of flapping resemble those of a duck, which Ivory-bills are said to resemble. The picture is too fuzzy for any definitive analysis, but when blown up I think I see a white trailing edge on the wings of two of them, which reinforces the idea of Ivory-bills. But I'm afraid it might be a case of "I wouldn't have seen it if I hadn't believed it." Therefore, my best guess is a group of **Pileated Woodpeckers**. I hope I'm wrong.

— **Chuck Trost**
POCATELLO, IDAHO

I believe the three birds are **Pileated Woodpeckers**. The silhouettes suggest that species and the stark central tree trunk suggests woodpecker attractiveness. The geographic locale is appropriate. The possibility of Ivory-bills is remote.

— **Harold R. Dowell**
NAPLES, FLORIDA

The three birds in the photo appear—based on body size vs. wingspan, flight attitude, and comparison to surrounding trees—to be large woodpeckers. Although the pictures are blurry, there seems to be an indication of white on both the leading and trailing edges of the wings, against a uniformly dark body. The habitat of mature trees (sweetgum?), the location in the swamps of the Florida panhandle, and quite frankly my own wishes indicate the possibility of the Ivory-bill. They could also be **Pileated Woodpeckers**; that's probably thousands of times more likely. I certainly don't see anything in the photo that rules out Ivory-billed Woodpecker. I imagine you could work some magic with a photo enhancer and get a much clearer picture. I'll be thrilled if they're Ivory-bills. I still hold out hope for their resurrection!

— **Cathy Jaggars**
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA



For additional analyses of this installment of the *Birding* Photo Quiz, please see the WebExtra continued on the next page.

The fuzzy photo offered in this “bird quiz” is obviously not definitive; otherwise it would have been front-page news. However, many aspects of the photo support the identification of these three birds as **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**. The range and habitat are within those known for the species. The tree on the left hand side of the photo appears to be a sweetgum, as does the dead or partially dead tree in the center. Sweetgum is a favored species of the Ivory-bill and a partially dead one or dead one within a stand of sweetgums is characteristic habitat. The birds themselves are a loose association following one another, again typical for the species according to historical accounts.

The shape of the silhouette is as described by Tanner and has been compared to a Northern Pintail. The proportions of body length to wing span are similar to the only other in-flight photo I have seen, that being found on the Cornell website from the Singer Tract. The fuzziness of this photo prevents exact measurement and comparison to that photo. The birds in this photo seem to show varying wing widths and various degrees of pointed wing tips. This I attribute to the white wing edge against a pale sky and wing angle to the camera, as all three birds are in different phases of wing beats.

Obviously the picture is fuzzy enough that the birds could be interpreted far differently from what I see. While the Arkansas video raw footage does provide “jizz”, that identification too must still be “called by faith”. I am a believer and I believe this photo depicts three Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. No doubt non-believers will have a very different take on it.

— Fred Collins
HOUSTON, TEXAS

My heart nearly jumped out of my chest when I first saw this picture! The caption had been scrolled up, so I did not see where the picture was taken. All I saw were three silhouettes of strong-flying birds. They seem to be a little bigger than a crow and are flying straight and hard, “like a pintail” as James Tanner would say. They are not flying side by side but follow each other by a second or so. The bird at the top closely resembles the 1935 Arthur A. Allen photo of the Ivory-bill flying over the Singer Tract. The middle bird has the best view of the white trailing edge, although I still must admit that the focus in the picture is far from perfect, so *wanting* to see a white trailing edge may play a role. All of this supports the identification of these birds as **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**.

Then I saw that the picture had indeed come from the

Choctawhatchee River, the site of Geoffrey Hill, Dan Mennill, Brian Rolek, and Tyler Hicks’s remarkable reports of sightings and recordings of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker! This may be faith-based ornithology at its best, or faith-based ornithology may be getting more evidenced-based support. My diagnosis is Ivory-billed Woodpecker. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

— George Cresswell
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

I knew at once that these were **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**. But aside from the prominence of snags, typically cast in photos of Ivory-bill habitat, my first impression is not easy to analyze. First, I decided the birds are coming rather than going, because the wrist angle is reasonably clear and the form of the bird would not resemble any species flying away. The thin projection at the front of each bird is the long bill of a large woodpecker, not the legs at the rear of a sandpiper. And at the other end of these birds is the wedge-shaped closed tail of a woodpecker. The wings are well extended and not swept back as they might be in a photo of flying ducks or shorebirds. The primaries are very long and the shape of the wing is tapered, but has a rounded point—characters described for Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and totally wrong for the broad wing of a Pileated Woodpecker. Three birds traveling together just clear of the canopy are believable for Ivory-billed and not for Pileated.

A very important detail consistent in the wings of these three birds is a slight, stem-like projection on the trailing edge, back from the wrist. I believe this detail marks the overlap of inner primary feathers and outer secondaries. This overlap registers as something trailing from the wing in the photo because the surrounding area of white would be about as thin as a single feather. This washed-out area would be evidence of the white trailing edge field mark. Naturally, the white of the wing lining cannot be seen, as the thickness of the wing in the more frontal region would block the light.

I think the challenge is to make something other than Ivory-billed Woodpeckers out of these birds.

— Larry McQueen
EUGENE, OREGON

I believe you have captured an image of three **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**. Having seen these birds for myself, I will tell you that the first thing I looked at is the tail on the birds. When they fly over, even in poor light, you will see an ever-so-extended feather arrangement that tends to bend up-

ward. I see that in the picture.

Of course the obvious things are there. The neck. The beak, duck-like perhaps... But the wings are the giveaway: light-colored, translucent, and not long and pointed like a duck. I am sure it is a family of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

— William Smith
DAYTONA, FLORIDA

I just had to respond to the photos of the three birds from the Florida panhandle. I can honestly say that I have never seen anything like them. At first I was thinking large waterbird (maybe a loon?), then I thought, no, they're not that big. Then I read the paragraph on the location of the photo, and I immediately knew I'd never seen these three birds before, because they have to be **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**. Not the best photos, but I'd say that's what they are!

— Keith McMullen
O'FALLON, ILLINOIS

These are **Ivory-billed Woodpeckers**. Note the pointed tails, the wings, the long bills, and the habitat. This is probably a family group.

— John Tramontano
DOYLESTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

The utmost of "GISS" in a photographic identification, this image clearly asks "Are these Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, or anything else?" All three birds appear to be the same species flying overhead together toward the upper left. Silhouetting and black-and-white film render color distinction impossible, but the long, relatively thin wings seem to be distinctly lighter than the spindle-shaped body.

The lower bird demonstrates deep down-beats of its wings; all the birds show a long posterior body-tail projection tapering to a point, and an equally pointed head and neck. Many sulids show this cruciform silhouette, but gannets or boobies would have even longer wings, be lighter in color, and be unlikely in a western Florida swamp. Crows would have relatively shorter, more-rounded wings, and a less-pointed tail.

Loons or ducks (especially pintails, as per Tanner's observation) would not show such deep wingbeats and the appearance of gliding seen in the topmost bird would be unusual in Anatinae. I cannot conceive of any heron, crane, gull, or raptor that would have this appearance, so woodpeckers seem the only family possible as an answer, and Pileated vs. Ivory-billed is the question. Sibley's in-flight ventral illustrations (*North American Birds*, 2005, vol. 59, p.

209) reveal the key differences here: The quiz birds have wings too narrow and the tail-body extension too long and pointed to fit Pileated. Furthermore, the lightness of the underwing in total suggests **Ivory-billed Woodpecker**. The key word in the term GISS is "impression", defined by Webster as an "indistinct or imprecise notion, remembrance, belief, or opinion"; consequently for me this quiz ID involves a significant element of faith.

This is more of the sought-after photographic documentation that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker continues to exist on our planet. Let's change that ABA Code 6 to a 5 and keep looking.

— David Tietjen
HAMPTON COVE, ALABAMA

Obviously, given the location, the hope is that these birds are Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. I was involved in the Arkansas search in February 2007 and heard a double-rap, so I don't doubt the existence of this species. However, this photograph seems to me to be of three **European Starlings**. The elongated body and stiff, pointy wings are good for Ivory-billed Woodpecker, but there is no reference for size here. There is no way of telling how close these birds are to the treetops as they pass overhead. When I look at the lowest of the three birds in this picture (with wings near lowest flapping extent) I see a head shape that matches European Starling exactly. The neck is bent upward and the bill appears to be too gracile for a woodpecker. Further, the tail appears to be slightly forked, just as would be seen on European Starling but certainly not what one expects on Ivory-billed Woodpecker. This detail is not repeated in the other two birds, but given the poor resolution of the photo, it could be there and hard to see. I am concerned that there does not appear to be any contrast in the color of the underside of the wings. Tanner's drawings indicate that there should be a black stripe through the center of the white underwing, and I would expect that mark to produce visible contrast even in silhouettes such as these. Only one wing shows even a hint of a dark center, the right one of the middle bird, but that does not convince me. The photo's resolution is not sufficient to make very convincing arguments in any direction, at least as far as my computer monitor is able to reproduce.

— Wayne Meyer
SHERMAN, TEXAS

These three birds appear not to be Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. The most important point is as follows: (1) The under-

side wing pattern shows the light feathers along the leading part of the wing and the light or whitish secondaries, but the dark center part of the wing does not appear to extend out to the tips of the primaries, except for the bird in the upper part of the picture, which does show the dark into the primaries. Other points to consider are as follow: (2) The flight silhouette does agree with Ivory-billed Woodpecker; (3) the habitat is plausible; (4) size of the birds is difficult to determine except that they appear to be at about the same range; (5) it is difficult to determine bill color; (6) I do not know if there is a difference in the underwing pattern of adults and juveniles; and (7) the birds as shown are sufficiently indistinct and out-of-focus as to cause me to say that a **positive identification is not possible**.

— Richard Stuart
CLAREMORE, OKLAHOMA

At first glance, I wondered if the birds in the photo could be Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, and then wondered if that's what I was *supposed* to think. Oh how delightful it would be if it were so. But **the birds in the photo are not identifiable** to family, let alone species.

Not every bird seen in the field is identifiable. And not every bird in a photo is identifiable either. A good photo can reveal a wealth of visual information, but a bad one can provide much less information than what we perceive in situ. In this example we have lost shape, size, color, field marks, and jizz. One cannot tell which way the birds are flying, or which end is which. What a perfectly terrible photo.

In addition to physical and behavioral attributes, other ID tools are location, season, habitat, and prior reports of species in the area. The trouble with these is that they can mislead. It was a visiting birder who found the Whiskered

Tern in Delaware in 1993; how many locals saw the bird first and dismissed it? Have you ever witnessed birders look at the wrong bird at the location of a rarity, and think they have it? Perhaps the place and date are helpful, perhaps not.

These birds may very well be Ivory-bills, or you may believe that you can determine the identification from this photo, but I believe that it is impossible to do so. Automated time-lapse? Criminy, if you're going to go to the trouble of setting up something like this, get good equipment!

— Arie Gilbert
NORTH BABYLON, NEW YORK

When I blow up the photo, I see three flying birds that appear similar in shape, size, and color. The neck appears too short for any long-necked waterbird species (e.g., Anhinga, cormorant, duck, ibis) except perhaps for an ardeid with a folded neck. The shape is consistent with a woodpecker but is also consistent with a variety of shorter-necked waterbirds (e.g., rallids, shorebirds). Each bird has a blackish belly; the head, sides of the body, wings, and tail all appear to be a similar shade of gray, with the proximal middle portion of the wings appearing slightly darker. Based on shape and apparent color pattern, the birds strongly resemble molting Black-bellied Plovers retaining black in the belly (two even have a hint of a dirty armpit), but undoubtedly the true color pattern of the head, body, wings, and tail have been distorted by light artifacts. The birds may well be large woodpeckers (if so, I would guess Pileated), but other species cannot be eliminated. I am uncertain which family the birds belong to and believe the **identity of these birds is inconclusive**.

— Floyd Hayes
ANGWIN, CALIFORNIA