

Jizz

John Whale

The way
the mind
latches onto
the jizz
of a species

a bird
jerking
left and
then right
against
the tree
at the
correct
angle

before
pecking

even
in this
grainy
footage

might be
enough
to say
extinct
or not
extinct

or just
enough
to prove
the way
the mind

in all good
faith can
so quickly
convince
itself
that what
it sees

falls in
with its
own
dream of
life

Acknowledgments

This poem emerged indirectly from a conversation with Dr Lone Sorensen, Associate Professor of Political Communication in the School of Media and Communication. Her current project examines climate change politics in the post-truth era and she is also exploring new creative methods of generative writing and portraiture. We exchanged notes on the current challenge to conventional ideas of truth and on the surprising ways in which different forms of writing can surprise us by suddenly provided new perspectives on our familiar objects of study.

Recently, I have been writing poems about the extinction of bird species and how in certain cases this can lead to its own strange enthusiasm for rarity. A species sometimes takes on a mythic identity as a result of its proximity to extinction. The case of the ivory-billed woodpecker is perhaps one of the most extremes cases of this phenomenon. All birdwatchers are familiar with the necessity of accurate observation and equally aware of the dangers of seeing what they want to see. Claimed 'sightings' of the ivory-billed woodpecker take this to another level. My poem uses details of these sightings in order to engage with the problem of truth within the context of environmental idealism. It is some way to the side of our original conversation and in its own way - like so many poems - a surprise arrival in that it raises the problem of truth within rather than outside or in opposition to our environmental concerns.