HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS. By Christopher Cokinos. Jeremy P. Tarcher/ Putnam, New York, New York. 2000: 360 pp. $24.95 (cloth).—In *Hope Is the Thing With Feathers,* author Christopher Cokinos presents intriguing accounts of the lives and deaths of six extinct species (or races) of North American birds. As may be surmised from the title, which is taken from an Emily Dickinson poem, this is not a scientific work; rather, it is written for a lay audience. Information is presented on the basic natural history of each species (such as it is known), the historical context surrounding its extinction, and the specific events that led to its decline and ultimate extinction. Cokinos also includes his personal experience, such as a sighting of a similar species or a trip to the site of the death of the last known individual, as well as his reactions to the loss of species. The historical portions are engagingly well written and the text is interspersed with some fascinating photographs and plates, many rarely or never before published.

The book is divided into major sections on each species, each with one to three chapters. In the first chapter on the Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), the author describes his sighting of a pair of escaped Black-hooded Conures (presumably *Nandayus nenday*), brilliant green and out of place over a Kansas marsh in autumn. In his subsequent reading on this species, he learned that there had in fact been bright green, tropical looking psittacids in Kansas, and in the winter even. He details how this realization and his fascination with species gone forever set him off on the 10 years of research that resulted in *Hope Is the Thing With Feathers.* Similar personal narratives are interwoven into the chapters on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*), Heath Hen (*Tympanuchus cupido*), Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), Labrador Duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*), and Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*).

In the introduction (p. 3), Cokinos points out that "Perhaps unlike a professional historian and more like the poet I have been, I found myself drawn to the oddments, the margins, so that a cookbook's reference to Passenger Pigeon pie looms as importantly in this book as, say, logging statistics. A settler's account of how Carolina Parakeets in sycamores reminded him of Christmas trees in Germany—that matters to memory as much as facts of biology." A strength of the book is the manner in which Cokinos is able to interestingly present both the seemingly insignificant, such as the observations of early settlers, and the most current biological theory and knowledge (including a competent discussion of the generalized extinction process for the lay reader, with distinction between proximate and ultimate causes). I also enjoyed the stories of efforts by early conservationists and ornithologists, such as the search for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers at the Singer Tract in Louisiana by Arthur Allen, Peter Paul Kellogg, James Tanner, and George Sutton.

Excepting a reference to the use of rifles by early specimen collectors (the shotgun was the weapon of choice), I found few inaccuracies and have few criticisms. Mention is made of a stop to record Wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) at "the Stoddard plantation" in Georgia by the team mentioned above. Presumably this was the plantation of Herbert Stoddard, the great quail and turkey biologist, and it seems odd, particularly in the context of this story, that no more detail was offered on such a gathering of great ornithologists. Also, I occasionally found some of the accounts of the author's personal experiences as well as some of the philosophical reflections to be a bit long and tedious.

Cokinos suggests that "we must redefine hope from wish to work". In his book *Deep Enough for Ivorybills,* James Kilgo (1988, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina) relates how, as a child in the 1950s his family would travel to the beach and en route, cross the wide floodplains of South Carolina's rivers. Referring to the ex-

tensive bottomland hardwood forests, his father would say "I bet there're still Ivorybills in there." We all hope that an Ivory-billed Woodpecker or a Bachman's Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*) will again turn up, but since they almost certainly will not, the message of Cokinos' book is that we must do more than hope; we must act to prevent the extinction of the species we still have. An important step in this process is remembering the species and learning from the mistakes that led to their extinction. In this capacity, *Hope Is the Thing With Feathers* will be an important and, hopefully, enduring book.—JOHN C. KILGO.