

The Red-cockaded woodpecker has been designated as a federally endangered species since 1970. It was given the common name by Alexander Wilson in 1810 and is referred to as RCW by many birders.

This small black and white bird is about 7 inches (18 cm) long and is identified by its black barred back and white horizontal stripe wings, black cap and nape, white cheek patches on each side of the head, white under parts, streaked sparsely with black on each side of the breast and flanks and a distinctive call.

The Stone Age and Primitive Arts Festival has a new location for 2021, of Letchworth - Love Mounds Archaeological State Park - 4500 Sunray Road South, Tallahassee, Florida. The information below will be updated shortly.

Sex of adults are difficult to distinguish. Red streaks or "cockades" on either side of the males are rarely visible. These red cockades are absent in females.

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker feeds primarily on ants, beetles, cockroaches, caterpillars, wood-boring insects, and spiders and occasionally fruit and berries.

Habitat

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker makes its home in mature pine forest. Longleaf pines are most commonly preferred, but other species of southern pine are also acceptable. While other woodpeckers bore out cavities in dead trees where the wood is rotten and soft, the red-cockaded woodpecker is the only one which excavates exclusively in living pine trees.

The older pine is favored by the Red-cockaded Woodpecker because they suffer from a fungus called red heart rot. The fungus softens the interior wood of the tree, making it easier for the birds to peck their way into a new home. Cavities generally take 1 to 3 years to excavate.

RCW FACTS

- The RCW is one of the few bird species common to the southeastern United States.
- A cockade is a ribbon or ornament worn on a hat. The "cockade" of this woodpecker is the tiny red line on the side of the head of the male. It may be hidden and is very difficult to see.
- A group of woodpeckers has many collective nouns, including a "descent", "drumming", and "Gatling" of woodpeckers.
- The RCW is a privilege to see. It was listed as endangered by the Audubon Society in 1968 and then on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife list in 1970.
- In the early 1800's the Audubon Society considered this species to be abundant.
- The RCW is one of the United States least known woodpeckers.
- The primary threat to the RCW species is habitat loss due to logging and agriculture.
- *If you are planning a visit during nesting season from April to June, please use caution and do not approach the cavity trees closely.*

Behavior

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker are a territorial, non-migratory cooperative breeding species, frequently having the same mate for several years. Nesting season lasts from April to June. The breeding female lays three to four eggs in the breeding male's roost cavity.

Group members incubate the small white eggs for 10-12 days. Once hatched, the nestlings remain in the nest cavity for about 26 days. Upon fledgling, the young often remain with the parents, forming typically three to four members. There is only one pair of breeding birds within the group, and they normally only raise single offspring each year.

The other group members, called "helpers", usually males from the previous breeding season, help incubate the eggs and raise the young. Young females generally leave the group before the next breeding season, in search of solitary male groups.

Range & Population

Historically, this woodpecker has ranged as far north as New Jersey and Maryland in the United States, and as far west as eastern Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee. They have now become extinct in New Jersey, Maryland, Tennessee and Missouri.

Florida's population is estimated at 1,100 active family groups. Ochlockonee River State Park host a worth mentioning population. This species is a local, year round resident of Florida.

Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

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