

FACT SHEET

**Common
Name**

Red-cockaded
woodpecker

**Scientific
Name**

*Picoides
borealis*



**Life History
and Habitat**

The red-cockaded woodpecker is a small bird about the size of a cardinal (7.5-8.5 inches in length). The species is identified by its black cap and nape, black and white barred back, white underparts, and large, white cheek patches. The red cockade, which is rarely visible and only present on adult males, consists of a small streak of red feathers above each cheek patch. Red-cockaded woodpeckers inhabit open, mature pine forests with sparse midstory vegetation. Longleaf pine is preferred, although other pine species (loblolly, slash, shortleaf, pond, pitch, and Virginia) may be used when available but to a lesser extent. These woodpeckers are unique in that they exclusively excavate nest and roost cavities in mature (80+ years) live pines. Adults are territorial cooperative breeders, and a breeding group consists of the breeding pair and 1-4 adult “helpers” (usually male, and the progeny of one or both breeding adults). Typically each group member roosts alone in a cavity; the aggregate of roost trees and surplus cavity trees is called a cluster. Males and females can breed at 1 year of age if they secure a breeding vacancy. The nesting season extends from April through June and females lay an average of 3-4 eggs in the male’s roost cavity. All birds in a group will assist with egg incubation and the brooding of nestlings during the day. Young fledge on or near day 26 and either remain with the breeding group as a helper or disperse before the next breeding season. Red-cockaded woodpeckers forage in pine-dominated habitats and feed primarily on bark-dwelling arthropods (beetles, roaches, ants, etc.). Home range size is variable (200-400+ acres), and is related to amount and quality of available habitat.

Distribution

The red-cockaded woodpecker occurs in the Piedmont and coastal plain of the southeastern United States. In Florida, it is found from the Panhandle and throughout the peninsula, to northern Monroe County. Throughout its range, the species’ distribution is highly fragmented and restricted to areas where suitable habitat exists.