

Red-cockaded woodpecker

Picoides borealis



(Photo by FWC)

Taxonomic Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Piciformes

Family: Picidae

Genus/Species: *Picoides borealis*

Common Name: Red-cockaded woodpecker

Listing Status

Federal Status: Endangered

FL Status: Federally-designated Endangered

FNAI Ranks: G3/S2 (Globally: Rare/State: Imperiled)

IUCN: Not ranked

Physical Description

The red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) is a black and white bird that can reach lengths of 9 inches (22.9 centimeters) and a weight of 1.8 ounces (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011).

RCWs have a large white patch located on their cheek, a black head and neck, a white belly, and a barred black and white back. The red-cockade, which is only found on the male, consists of a small red streak above the cheek and is rarely visible.

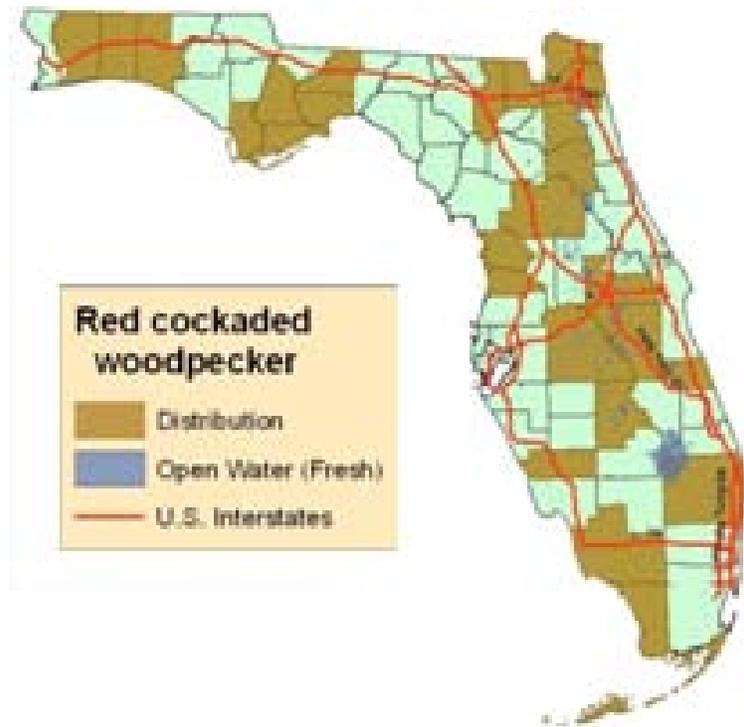
Life History

The diet of RCWs mainly consists of insects, arthropods, and seeds (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2011).

The nesting season for the RCW is between April and June. RCWs are unique in their nesting, as they only nest in self-made cavities in live pine trees, as opposed to dead trees which most woodpeckers prefer. Resin wells are also excavated by RCWs below their cavities to prevent predators from climbing cavity trees and robbing nests. RCWs are cooperative breeders, as they have up to four, but generally one or two, "helpers" that will help incubate the eggs, as well as feed and brood nestlings and fledglings (R. Boughton pers comm. 2011). Females will lay three to four eggs per nesting. The incubation period for the eggs of RCWs are able to first fly at 26 days old and will either stay with the breeding group as a helper, or leave the group before the next breeding season.

Habitat & Distribution

RCWs inhabit 90-100 year-old longleaf pine, pond pine, pitch pine, and Virginia pine ecosystems from North Carolina, south to Florida, and west to Texas (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001, R. Boughton pers comm. 2011). In Florida, the RCW inhabits slash, longleaf, and loblolly pines (R. Boughton pers comm. 2011).



Threats

The main threat to the RCW is the loss and deterioration of habitat. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, longleaf pines were extensively logged for their value as lumber. Longleaf pine communities were also destroyed and transformed into agriculture fields. Since the 1950's, clear cutting of longleaf pines for development and agriculture has been a threat to many species that depend on the old-growth pine as it caused habitat fragmentation. Fire suppression can degrade longleaf and slash pine communities causing the area to become a foraging area with low productivity.

Conservation & Management

The RCW is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is also protected as an Endangered species by the Federal Endangered Species Act and as a Federally-designated Endangered species by [Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule](#).

In 2006, FWC began a statewide [RCW Safe Harbor Program](#) through an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The goal of the program is to help conserve the RCW through partnerships with private landowners. Since RCWs are protected under the ESA, landowners have a legal obligation to protect the birds and their habitat. The program currently includes 15 private properties and approximately 65,000 acres. Safe Harbor Agreements make sense whenever landowners are interested in restoring or enhancing habitats that may benefit this endangered species but are concerned about incurring additional regulatory restrictions on the use of their land. It effectively freezes a landowner's ESA responsibilities as long as the owner agrees to restore, enhance, or create habitat that benefits red-cockaded woodpeckers. The Safe Harbor Program has many benefits to landowners, but the primary incentive is the certainty they gain regarding future land use. Property owners can maintain, restore or enhance red-cockaded woodpecker habitat, with the assurance that additional birds will not result in more land use restrictions. The program is voluntary and a landowner can withdraw from it at any time

[-Federal Recovery Plan](#)

[-FWC Management Plan](#)

Other Informative Links

[Birds of North America](#)

[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

[FWC Petitions and Listing Actions](#)

[The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[University of Florida](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species Profile](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Plan](#)

[U.S. Geological Survey](#)

References

Florida Natural Areas Inventory. 2001. Field guide to the rare animals of Florida.

http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Picoides_borealis.PDF

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (n.d.). Red-cockaded woodpecker. Retrieved May 23, 2011,

from All About Birds: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-cockaded_Woodpecker/id