



RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER

BACKFROMTHEBRINK.ORG



Symbol of the Imperiled Southeastern Forest

Red-cockaded woodpeckers are family birds. Rather than flying the coop when grown (like most young adult birds), red-cockaded offspring, especially males, often stay to help their parents raise new broods. The woodpeckers hollow out nest cavities in living pine trees, unlike other American woodpeckers that bore holes in the soft, rotten wood of dead trunks. A family group (or colony) of red-cockaded woodpeckers may call a cluster of as many as 30 trees their home.

At-Risk Story

Red-cockaded woodpeckers need open parklike forests, preferably longleaf pine. Historically, natural wildfires shaped the bird's habitat by burning the understory and leaving the fire-resistant pine canopy intact. Without these fires that periodically cleared the woodpecker habitat before Europeans settled in the area, habitat must be managed in a way that mimics the historic clearing in order for this imperiled bird to survive.

Habitat and Range

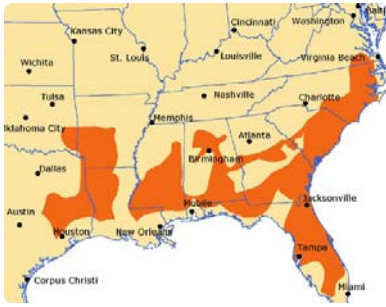
Red-cockaded woodpeckers require a mature pine forest, with some trees at least 60 to 80 years old. Once common throughout the Southeast when longleafs dominated the landscape, the bird declined precipitously along with its habitat of about 60 to 92 million acres. After decades of logging and land use conversion, a scarce 3 million acres of longleaf remain—and only 3% of that is considered to be in relatively natural condition.

Characteristics

The red-cockaded woodpecker is about 8-9 inches from beak to tail tip (though the size varies within the bird's range and some sources say it can be as short as 7 inches), and its wingspan is approximately 15 inches. The bird has a black cap and white cheeks. The cockade—small red stripes on the side of each cheek behind the eyes—is visible only in breeding males (and briefly, newly hatched males) but can be difficult to spot. The endangered bird may be confused with the downy and the hairy woodpecker; both have white backs, unlike the black and white barred back of the red-cockaded woodpecker. Only the red-cockaded has white cheek patches.

ESA Listing Detail

In 1970, the red-cockaded woodpecker was designated as *endangered* throughout its entire range, which extends from Texas east to Florida and north into Virginia. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Region (Region 4) is the lead region for this entity.



The Situation Today

Birds with strong family values, red-cockaded woodpeckers in Audubon's time were common in longleaf and other pine forests from Texas to Florida to Maryland. As old-growth longleaf pine forests succumbed to timber harvests, agricultural conversions, fire suppression and other factors, so, too, the woodpecker declined. Today about 14,000 birds live in about 5,600 family groups on both public and privately owned lands. Until recently, recovery efforts have almost exclusively focused on federal lands. In the past decade, however, landowners have enrolled more than half a million acres of privately owned land in five states (including forests, horse farms, golf course resorts, residential properties and even a monastery) in Safe Harbor agreements. These lands are being restored and maintained with prescribed burns, artificial nesting cavity installations and other activities. After decades of decline or absence, the bird is increasing on some lands that are under good management.

Our 10-Year Vision

Our goal is to continue and expand our work with forest landowners and other partners in the Southeast to reverse the population decline of woodpeckers on private land. Expanding participation in Safe Harbor agreements beyond the roughly 500,000 acres currently enrolled is a vital part of that effort as is developing tools to permanently protect habitat on private lands.

Restoration Needed

- Prescribed burning or other management to keep pine forest understory open
- Incentives for landowners to plant longleaf pines and protect mature pines
- Installation of artificial nest cavities in areas that encourage birds to reoccupy habitat
- Expanded use of Safe Harbor agreements to encourage landowners to restore habitat

Acres/Landowners Needed

650,000 acres and 400 landowners

Cost of Recovery

Environmental Defense believes significant progress toward recovery can be made with a modest amount of money if it is targeted to specific areas and activities. Over the next 10 years, we will work to direct more than \$1.5 million to on-the-ground restoration projects that will help bring the red-cockaded woodpecker Back from the Brink.

Every Dollar Counts

\$15 will pay for prescribed burning on an acre of forest habitat.

\$150 will pay for the installation of an artificial nest cavity.

\$1,000 will pay for a baseline survey to enroll an owner of a 300-acre forest parcel in a Safe Harbor agreement.