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Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

This handsome, conspicuous woodpecker is a widespread but uncommon species residing throughout the year in open, deciduous woodlands of the eastern United States. It breeds from southern Canada south to central Texas, the northern Gulf coast, and South Florida and west to central Montana, eastern Wyoming, central Colorado, and northern New Mexico (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Because Red-headed Woodpeckers favor open areas for nesting, it is relatively easy to find their nests and confirm breeding. They prefer well-weathered snags that have lost their bark (Kilham 1983) in open woods, clear-cuts, and pastures, as well as parks and open rural and suburban habitats. They often move into a forest following a severe fire (Bent 1939). Red-headed Woodpeckers are not suspicious of humans, and their bright colors make them conspicuous. Therefore, a majority of the quadrangle records represent confirmed breeding. This species' preference for open nesting sites is shared by the *European Starling*, which often usurps its cavities (Ingold 1989).

In the spring and summer, approximately two-thirds of the Red-headed Woodpecker's diet consists of animal matter; in the fall and winter, animal matter comprises a quarter or less of the diet (Martin et al. 1951). It takes fruits, berries, nuts, corn, and other grains. Unlike most other woodpeckers, it has a habit of "hawking" for insects from a favored perch and catching them in flight (Bent 1939, Kilham 1983) or landing on roadways to pick up insects. Unfortunately, many Red-headed Woodpeckers are killed by automobiles in this manner.

The nesting cavity is located from 2 to 24 m (5 to 80 ft) above the ground, usually in a barkless dead tree (Bent 1939, Kilham 1983). The cavity takes 6 to 17 days to excavate (Jackson 1976, Ehrlich et al. 1988). No nesting material is added to the cavity, but wood chips accumulate on the bottom. Four to 7 white eggs are laid. Incubation is by both adults and takes 12 to 14 days. The young are altricial and stay in the cavity for approximately 25 days (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). In Florida, Red-headed Woodpeckers are normally single-brooded, but Smith and Layne (1986) and McNair (1996) report pairs in Highlands and Liberty Counties, respectively, that raised 2 broods.

Seasonal Occurrence. Migration patterns of this bird are incompletely known, although numbers of them are spotted on the Gulf coast during April to late May and September through October (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Egg dates are between May and September.

Status. This partially migratory woodpecker has a somewhat patchy breeding distribution in Florida; some areas which appear to be suitable breeding habitat are unoccupied. It is absent from much of South Florida and many areas in Osceola, southern Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, and Okeechobee counties. For unknown reasons it is clearly more widespread in the western half of the central and southern peninsula than in the eastern half.

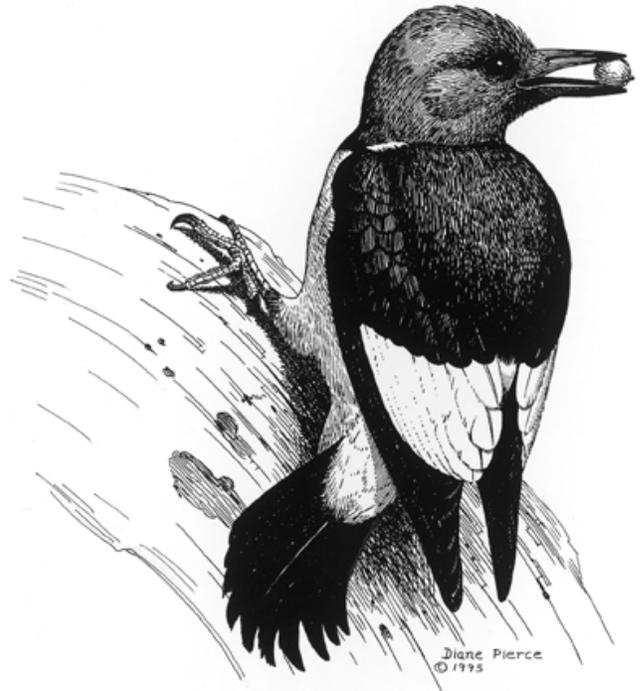


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