

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

(*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

Guidance for Conservation

The Red-headed Woodpecker is an uncommon and declining resident of open woodlands in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

This species is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and listed as Special Concern in New York. It receives a "Yellow" designation from the National Audubon Society as a species of national conservation concern. Partners in Flight lists it as a Species of Continental Concern and of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 13, 28, and 30. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a severe decline in populations statewide in the past four decades. NY Breeding Bird Atlas data show a decline in distribution in the Hudson River Valley.



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Identification

This robin-sized woodpecker is easily identified. The adult bird has a brilliant red head, neck, and throat thinly bordered in black, white underparts, and a black back and tail. Its black wings have large white patches. The immature bird has overall brown upperparts and white underparts. Its voice is generally described as a loud series of "kweer, kweer, kweer" sounds.

Habitat

This woodpecker is found in open deciduous woodlands, especially oak or beech, river bottoms, groves of dead and dying trees, orchards, urban parks, open agricultural country, savannah-like grasslands with scattered trees, forest edges, and along roadsides. It is also attracted to beaver ponds, open wooded swamps with dead trees and stumps, and edges of reservoirs. It avoids forests with closed canopies. It requires areas with dead trees that provide nesting and roosting sites, and abundant ground cover that supports healthy insect populations

Food

This bird catches its prey on the wing or by foraging in dead trees or on the ground. It eats insects and other invertebrates, berries and nuts, as well as the young and eggs of other birds. It requires open areas both for flycatching and ground foraging. It stores nuts and grasshoppers by wedging them in bark crevices, fence post cracks, and other crannies.

Nesting

This cavity-nesting bird nests in dead trees, dead portions of live trees, snags, utility poles, or fence posts, generally in open areas or in stands of trees with no understory. The nest-hole is excavated by the male and is generally 8-80 feet above the ground. It sometimes uses existing holes in poles or posts. It will use nest boxes.

Threats

- Loss of nesting habitat due to reduction in the number of dead trees and snags.
- Competition with European Starlings for nest cavities.
- Habitat loss due to suburban development.
- Loss of habitat due to changing agricultural practices that result in the loss of small orchards, larger monoculture fields, and removal of hedgerows.

Management Recommendations

- Maintain open areas with little understory.
- Provide small and large snags and dead limbs on large living trees to provide nesting, roosting, and foraging opportunities.
- Use prescribed burning to maintain a savannah-like condition with good aerial and ground foraging opportunities.
- Manage habitat so as to provide forest fragments greater than 5 acres with large snags for nesting and open areas for catching flying insects.

Adapted from Brown 2000, NatureServe 2008 and Smith et al. 2000.

For more information, see the following references:

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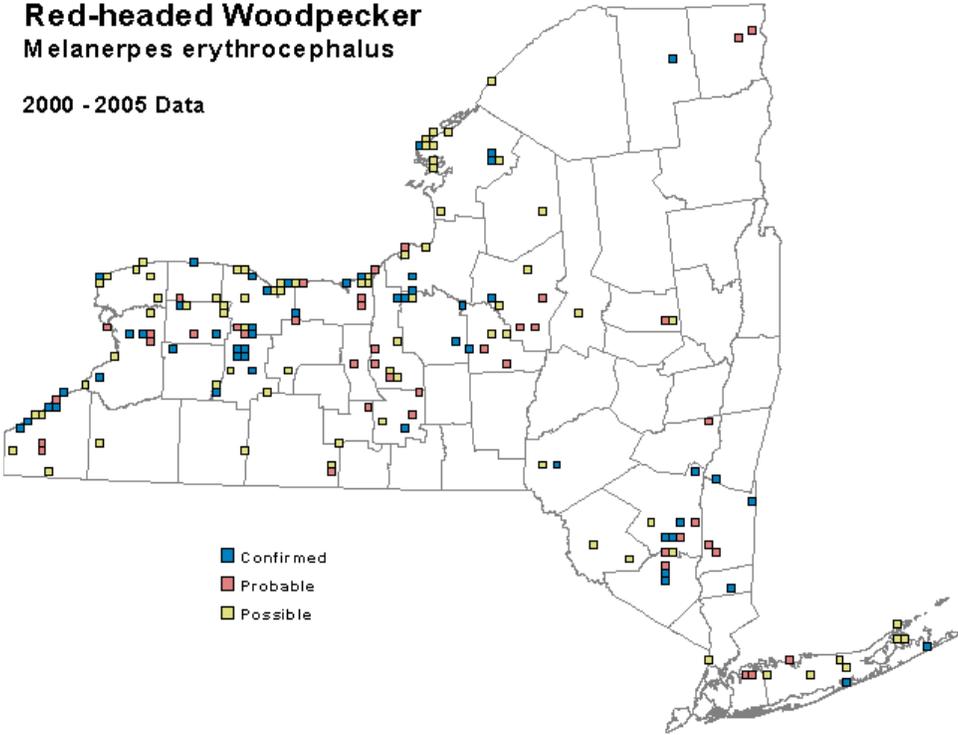
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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Red-headed Woodpecker
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2000 - 2005 Data



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1980 - 1985 Data

