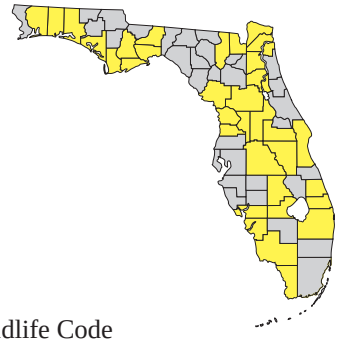
RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER
Picoides borealis



Order: Piciformes
Family: Picidae
FNAI Ranks: G3/S2
U.S. Status: Endangered
FL Status: Threatened
U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.

Description: This small woodpecker can be distinguished by its barred, black and white back and wings, black cap and nape, and white cheek patches on each side of the head. Sexes of adults are difficult to distinguish. Red streaks or "cockades" on either side of head of adult males are rarely visible. Juvenile males can be identified by a small, circular patch of red on top of the head that is visible until early fall. This is absent in juvenile females.

© Barry Mansell

Similar Species: No other Florida woodpecker has a barred "ladder" or "zebra" back and the large, unbroken white cheek patches. Downy (*Picoides pubescens*) and hairy (*P. villosus*) woodpeckers are most likely to be confused, but these species have solid white down the middle of the back and a black triangular patch that covers much of the cheek.

Habitat: Inhabits open, mature pine woodlands that have a diversity of grass, forb, and shrub species. Generally occupies longleaf pine flatwoods in north and central Florida, mixed longleaf pine and slash pine in south-central Florida, and slash pine in south Florida outside the range of

longleaf pine. Forage in several forested habitat types that include pines of various ages, but prefer more mature pines.

Seasonal Occurrence: Nonmigratory. Maintains territories throughout year. They are cooperative breeders with young males characteristically remaining in many natal territories. Young females and non-helper males typically disperse a limited distance during their first winter in search of breeding opportunities elsewhere. Social groups or clans generally constrict the use of their home range when nestlings are present and expand their use during fall and winter after young have fledged.

Florida Distribution: Occurs locally from the western panhandle through the peninsula to south Florida. Distribution tied to remaining areas of old-growth pine forests. Southernmost occurrence is the Big Cypress National Preserve in Collier and Monroe counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Primarily Southeastern Coastal Plain from North Carolina to Texas and southern Arkansas. Currently, populations are highly fragmented, and most are small. As of 1990, nearly 90 percent of active sites were in Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Louisiana, and Texas. More than half of the remaining population (9,300 birds) were found on just six sites, while the remaining birds were scattered across more than 100 sites.

Conservation Status: Florida has the largest number of active sites in the world, but increasing fragmentation and poor management of appropriate habitat is cause for concern. Largest concentrations occur on federally managed lands (ca. 80 percent of active sites), with state-owned and private lands supporting a significant number of smaller populations. Two largest populations, comprising 70 percent of active sites, occur on Eglin Air Force Base and Apalachicola National Forest, and there is evidence of declines in the latter.

Protection and Management: Federal and state agencies must aggressively manage their extensive tracts of pine forests. Habitat quality in such areas depends on fire for maintaining open, park-like conditions. Considerable variation exists in habitat parameters range-wide, resulting in variable home-range sizes depending on amount and quality of available habitat. Focus management actions on both nesting and foraging requirements. Protect additional populations on private lands to help guard against catastrophic events (e.g., hurricanes).

Selected References: James 1991, Kulhavy et al. (eds.) 1995, Poole and Gill (eds.) 1994, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.