

1994

## Red-cockaded Woodpecker

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*The Center for Conservation Biology*

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF GAME & INLAND FISHERIES  
PERFORMANCE REPORT (July 1, 1993 - June 30, 1994)

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PROJECT TITLE:	WILDLIFE CONSERVATION	PROJ. NO:	WE99R-3
STUDY TITLE:	RARE, THREATENED, & ENDANGERED BIRD CONSERVATION	STUDY NO:	IV
JOB TITLE:	RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER	JOB NO:	VII
PERSONNEL:	DANA BRADSHAW	COSTS:	
		Total:	\$27,000
		Federal:	\$20,250
		State:	\$6,750

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SUMMARY:

Although existing at only a fraction of its original numbers, the red-cockaded woodpecker population in Virginia remains somewhat stable at about 16 birds. Of 5 clans with a total of 10 adults prior to breeding season, only two clans were known to be successful this year producing 3 young. At each of two additional sites only one bird currently exists, probably a lone territorial male. A fifth site was abandoned prior to breeding season and was relocated in late summer with three birds present. A sixth site was discovered this summer during a timber harvest. It contained two birds.

Following several land transfers in 1992, all known red-cockaded woodpecker colonies are still under some type of management agreement with respective landowners. At least one of these owners is presently engaged in an aggressive habitat improvement plan to enhance the overall site quality at two active sites.

OBJECTIVE A: To survey and monitor existing populations of Red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia.

FINDINGS:

Both fall and spring surveys were conducted to determine the status and distribution of red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia. Of the five known sites that harbored birds prior to breeding season, only two were known to produce young this year. The Manry West site contained four adults prior to breeding season, but produced only one young. This site appears to have benefitted from the application of hardwood herbicide during the fall of 1991. In addition, the colony site at this location was further improved following the removal of all midstory pines and hardwoods, greatly improving the site quality around the cavity trees.

The status of the Manry East site was unknown until late summer. This site was abandoned during the 1993 breeding season when the nest tree died from pine beetle infestation. The birds could not be relocated during that season. An incomplete survey during the winter did not turn up any additional evidence of site occupation. Although no evidence of activity at this site was apparent during the breeding season this year, a hardwood timber removal project taking place after the breeding season turned up additional trees that are harboring three birds. It is not known if the third bird is a young bird of this year or last year.

A new site was discovered by timber crews during a hardwood removal operation in August. The site is located between Manry East and Manry West and is tentatively being referred to as Manry Central. The site contains two birds which are suspected to originate from the Manry West site. No information is available on whether or not this clan is comprised of a mated pair or whether they produced young this year or not. Monitoring efforts will concentrate on this area in the coming year to identify its significance and relationship to the surrounding colonies. This area now comprises one of three active red-cockaded woodpecker sites all within 1.5 miles of each other, providing the single best chance for long-term viability of this species in Virginia.

The Manry South site was occupied by two adults each of which was utilizing a remnant cavity tree from two different previously occupied sites. This placed the two birds some quarter of a mile apart over the last year. Despite their distance this pair was successful in bringing off two young this summer. At least one new cavity tree has been identified adjacent to the nest tree suggesting this clan may be trying to get a firm foothold in one of these areas. The productivity at this site comes as a precursor to another scheduled timber harvest by the current landowner. Although there is no active habitat management ongoing on this tract the landowner has been cooperative in scheduling timber harvests with minimum impacts to the birds and their principal foraging areas.

The two adult red-cockadedes that were present at the Sussex tract abandoned the previous colony site prior to nesting last year and could not be located last fall. However this winter one adult has since been relocated at a new cavity tree near the last active nesting site. This bird was monitored throughout the spring and summer, but was never seen in the company of another bird. It therefore appears that one of the breeding adults at this site was lost, and only a single bird remains. One reason for site abandonment by birds at this area may stem from the proportion of foraging area that was harvested in 1990 thereby reducing the overall quality of this site to woodpeckers.

The Sebrell site as of this summer still harbored only one bird, an adult male, present as a single individual since the fall of 1991. Although this site underwent hardwood herbicide application and a prescribed burn, there appears to be a dwindling chance of coaxing additional woodpeckers into this area. And finally the Yale site which was abandoned in the fall of 1990 has continued to provide no evidence of occupation by red-cockaded woodpeckers. While there have been reports of birds near this area, there have been no confirmed sightings, signifying a continuation of the abandoned status of this area.

Table 1. Red-cockaded woodpecker status and productivity, 1994.

SITE	ADULTS	YOUNG PRODUCED	TOTALS	1993 TOTALS
Manry C	-	-	2	2
Manry E.	-	-	3	6
Manry W.	4	2	5	3
Manry S.	2	0	4	1
Sebrell	1	0	1	2
Sussex	1	0	1	0
Yale	0	0	0	0
totals	10	3	16	14

OBJECTIVE B: Coordinate the implementation of a long-term management plan for red-cockaded woodpeckers in the state.

FINDINGS:

All current red-cockaded woodpecker sites are still under some degree of protection through various management agreements. This was in part facilitated by the transfer of ownership of three sites in 1992 to a more conservation-oriented timber company. The three sites included the Manry East, Manry West, and Yale sites. An active program of intensive habitat management has been underway at the two of these sites that still harbor woodpeckers. All midstory trees were removed from the colony area prior to breeding season at the Manry West site this year. Then following the breeding season, a hardwood tree removal operation was undertaken in several forested tracts containing the Manry East site and the new Manry Central site, and is still underway at present. The result of these activities to date has been to greatly improve the overall site quality at all three sites. The Manry South is under the ownership of another timber company that is also working with VDGIF to maintain adequate habitat to support the birds, although no burning or hardwood removal plan is currently in place. All landowners are however allowing regular surveys and permitting DGIF personnel to identify and mark cavity trees and provide status reports. All activities regarding the conservation of this species in Virginia are being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

OBJECTIVE C: Survey appropriate areas for additional clans of red-cockaded woodpeckers.

FINDINGS:

A comprehensive survey was initiated this year to evaluate the suitability for red-cockaded of all remaining pine habitat across the seven southeastern counties and cities that historically harbored this species. A hierarchical scale of evaluating habitats was adopted first making use of aerial photo interpretation. Aerial photographs were used to identify all areas of potential habitat based on patch size and general age class. Those areas meeting the initial criteria were then ground-truthed to evaluate current status and actual suitability. Areas deemed suitable at this juncture were then mapped and recorded to be surveyed this winter after leaf-off. Sussex County and part of Southampton County were completed for the first two phases of this evaluation technique. It is hoped that surveys of identified areas can begin this winter along with additional phase I and II work on other

counties.

Five site visits were made this year to investigate potential red-cockaded woodpecker activity in three southeastern counties. None of these visits produced evidence of this species however.