

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker in North Mississippi

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Aside from old sightings in Tishomingo County (Allison 1907) there have been no reported colonies of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in north Mississippi. There are, however, more recent records of the species in eastern Tennessee (Calhoun 1941; Coffey 1963). In May 1975 J. Jackson received a report from Charles Hagen and Frank Troskey of Weyerhaeuser Company of a possible Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony on the Holly Springs National Forest in Lafayette County. That portion of the forest including the possible colony was being marked for a timber sale at the time, hence the colony's discovery. Jackson notified the endangered species office and the U.S. Forest Service of the possible colony and its importance and, in June 1975 he and David Werschkul searched the area but located neither a colony nor the birds. In a second attempt to locate the colony, we visited the area on 25 September 1976. Considerable timber harvesting had taken place in the area, but we were successful in locating a colony

(Fig. 1) and at least three Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at the east edge of Township 7 S, Range 2 W.



Two to three acres surrounding two cavity trees had been marked for cutting but, after discovery of the colony by Forest Service personnel had been removed from the timber sale. A search of the cutover area revealed two additional cavity trees. One was adjacent to a logging road and had been damaged during the logging operation (Fig. 2). Now that it has been isolated by the timber harvest, it is highly susceptible to wind damage. The second cavity tree found in the harvest area had already snapped off at the cavity (Fig. 3).

Figure 1. Active Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavity in a shortleaf pine, Lafayette Co., Ms., 26 Sept. 1976. Note the whitened surface of the tree trunk caused by an excessive accumulation of dried pine gum which had flowed from the birds' resin wells around the cavity.

All of the cavity trees were shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*). In the undisturbed area there was a thick understory of dogwood (*Cornus florida*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), French mulberry (*Callicarpa americana*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), southern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), winged elm (*Ulmus alata*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), and shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*). In our opinion the understory was nearly to the point of causing abandonment of the colony by the birds and was in need of management. Hardwoods were approaching the height of the Red-cockaded cavity (11 m) and the hardwood canopy was so complete that it was difficult to get a good view of the active cavity (Fig. 1).

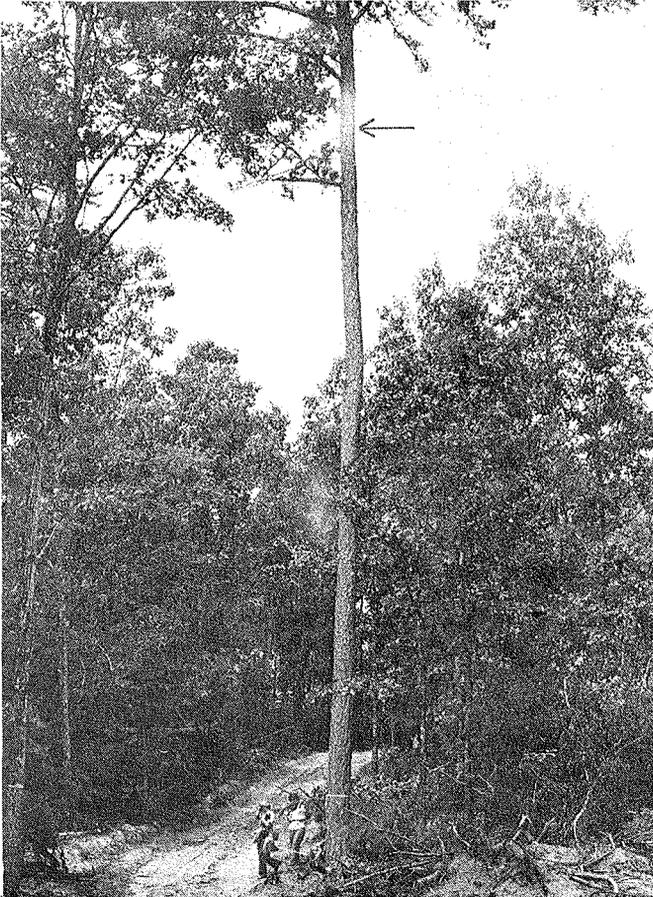


Figure 2. A Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavity start in a shortleaf pine southwest of the active cavity trees.

Ramey visited the colony area again on 25 October and 25 November 1976 and on 22 January 1977. On each occasion at least one Red-cockaded Woodpecker was observed in the vicinity of the cavity trees. Ramey visited the site again on 10 April 1977 and was unable to locate the birds although the appearance of the cavity trees still suggests the colony is active. Another abandoned cavity tree was discovered south of the main colony site and much of the area around the protected site had been cleared.



Figure 3. A former Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavity tree snapped off at the cavity by wind. This often happens to cavity trees that are left when the forest around them is cut.

The U.S. Forest Service was informed of the probable existence of the colony in May 1975 but traded the land the colony is located on to Dunlap and Kyle Realty Company of Batesville, Mississippi, on 7 October 1975.

In a letter of 4 October 1976, District Ranger Roy J. Smith indicated that Dunlap and Kyle Realty Company was informed of the presence and importance of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony and that Mr. R. H. Dunlap, company president, indicated that no more timber would be removed from the main colony site. We appreciate the consideration of Dunlap and Kyle Realty Company and hope that they will be able to assure management of the colony area in a manner consistent with the continued existence of the birds.

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Literature Cited

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