

Rare Woodpecker at OSU Museum

Edward S. Thomas

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Among the cherished specimens in the bird collection of the Ohio State University Museum of Zoology is a woodpecker bearing the following label: "Picus borealis. Red Cockated (sic) Woodpecker. March 15, 1872. Loc. Columbus," and on the opposite side, "It was in the company with another of its own kind and 2 or 3 Sapsuckers, Nuthatches, etc., and shot from a high tree between Canal and Scioto Rivers."

This record has been viewed with a certain amount of skepticism by ornithologists. The identification is certainly correct. The label is in the well-known handwriting of Dr. Theodore Jasper, early Columbus ornithologist whose reputation as an ornithologist and a gentleman is above reproach.

And yet, the red-cockaded woodpecker otherwise was not known closer than the mountains of eastern West Virginia. Its occurrence at Columbus would be most unusual. Mistakes can happen.....

But history has a way of repeating itself. On April 22, Eddie Bowen, seasonal naturalist with the Ohio Division of Parks reported seeing a red-cockaded woodpecker at the parking lot at Old Man's Cave State Park. The identification was verified by William B. Price, zoology professor in Athens County and by Bill Loebick, chief naturalist of the Division of Parks. The first authenticated record of this species for Ohio in more than 100 years!



On April 29, Loebick was good enough to take me with him to Old Man's Cave in the hope of seeing the bird. On arriving at the place, we found Drs. Milton B. and Mary A. Trautman and Mrs. Aurthur S. Kiefer already there, along with Eddie Bowen. Not far away was Dr. Albert F. Prebus, physics department, OSU. Soon we were joined by Jim Fry, naturalist, Columbus Metropolitan Parks.

We tramped back and forth around the parking lot. Some of us watched a half-dead pine tree which the bird was supposed to frequent. After three hours of search, no sign of a red-cockaded.

Then, Bill, Milt, Eddie and I drove out to see some "yellow" trilliums which Eddie had located, leaving Jim and the two women to watch for the bird. Dr. Prebus left to meet a class at the University. Upon our return after seeing the trilliums, we found Jim and the ladies waving their arms wildly. They had found the woodpecker! In a moment, we also were looking at it. It was unquestionably a red-cockaded. But it was against the light and our view of it was not too satisfactory.

Then it flew and we groaned. However, it circled around and alighted on a tree trunk with the sun square at our backs! For minutes on end. We had a wonderful view of the marvelous creature. Bill secured a number of photographs of it. It resembled the downy and hairy woodpeckers, being only a little smaller than the hairy. Its most conspicuous feature was its "ladder back," a series of narrow black and white bars on its back. Also very showy was its snow-white cheek, with a narrow malar stripe ("Mutton-chops"). Its sides were streaked with black, as contrasted with the pure white sides of downy and hairy. A fine record!

