

# Observations of nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers at Bluff Spring Fen, Cook County

*By Arlene Koziol*

During the week of 7 July 2006, I had an enjoyable time observing adult Red-headed Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) foraging for food for their offspring at the Bluff Spring Fen in South Elgin, Cook County. These birds are expert flyers, and the remarkable thing about them is their ability to catch insects in mid-flight. They can fly straight up or down from a perch, in any direction while airborne, and can turn on a dime. When the wind accelerates, the woodpeckers prefer to hunt for bugs

on the tree trunks and branches. I observed the woodpeckers capturing many insects in this manner. The insect was prepared for their young by smashing it into the tree with their beaks. Afterward, the parent would fly back to the cavity nest hole, turn its head to listen, and present the

insect to the young. Several presentations were made before the nestlings would take their meal. Sometimes the parents would eat the insects after killing them. At times the birds would cache the extra bugs in cracks in the bark of the cottonwood trees.

A pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers looks to set up shop at Bluff Spring Fen in Cook County.

A Red-headed Woodpecker is superbly adapted to its way of living. For foraging and nesting, its body must cling and hammer into hard surfaces. A woodpecker braces with its tail as it moves up and down the tree

