

1872; and another photographed in Hocking County in southeastern Ohio from 22 April to 4 May 1975 (Peterjohn 1989). Although listed by many sources as accidental in Pennsylvania, the species is considered hypothetical because the only documented specimen, said to have been collected at Philadelphia in 1961, has been lost (McWilliams and Brauning 2000).

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker requires extensive stands of large, mature pines, with a sparse understory. This requirement produces two potential threats to the species' future. First, large pines are extremely valuable for timber, and as a result much of the original habitat has been cleared. Second, the sparse or grassy understory is naturally maintained by frequent fires. Fire prevention efforts allow a denser growth, eventually making the habitat unsuitable for the woodpeckers. These problems, with a resulting decrease in population, resulted in the Red-cockaded Woodpecker being placed on the federally endangered species list in 1970. Despite protection, the species has continued to decline, and populations in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia are nearly gone, if not already extirpated.

### **Dispersal in Red-cockaded Woodpeckers**

The precarious status and normal distribution of this species raises an obvious question: Where did our bird come from? The nearest population, in eastern Kentucky, is approximately 650 km away, in a straight line. But our bird was not banded, and the small population in Kentucky was entirely color-banded (and, except for one male, recently re-introduced from elsewhere). Our bird must have come from somewhere even farther.

Red-cockaded Woodpeckers do regularly undertake long-distance movements. Dispersals up to 100 km have been recorded on a number of occasions, by both immature and adult birds. Conner et al (1997) mentioned a single dispersal of 338 km, from Arkansas to Louisiana. However, the Illinois Beach State Park woodpecker must have come from nearly twice that far, probably more, across large areas of



*Red-cockaded Woodpecker below its roost hole at Illinois Beach State Park in Lake County, 27 August 2000. Photo by Richard Biss.*

unsuitable habitat. Conner et al (1997) did suggest that low population density may lead to increased dispersal distance, as individuals continue to travel until they locate a suitable breeding colony. Perhaps a bird dispersing from a northern colony could continue north reaching Illinois Beach State Park.

Be that as it may, though, this individual eventually decided enough was enough. After an apparent epic journey, "our" Red-cockaded Woodpecker remained in the pines at Illinois Beach State Park throughout the fall. It was last seen on 10 December 2000, when Alan Stokie and Robert Erickson observed it. Heavy snow on 11 December put an end to casual forays into the pines, but thorough searches on 31 December 2000 and 1 January 2001 (the date of the Waukegan CBC) and 7 January 2001 failed to produce the bird. Given the harsh weather during the