

Grade 7 Informational/Expository Writing Prompt – “Woodpecker”

Using evidence from the passages, write a 2-3 paragraph explanation for your science class about how the red-cockaded woodpecker’s nesting habits have caused this bird to become endangered. Your explanation must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the “Woodpecker” text set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- Plan your explanation
- Write your explanation
- Revise and edit your explanation

Be sure to

- Use evidence from multiple sources
- Do not over rely on one source
- Type your answer in a new Word document

The red-cockaded woodpecker is a bird which is at risk of becoming extinct. It has been placed on the endangered species list and efforts are being made to protect it so that the species does not disappear forever.

Sign Posted



Red-cockaded Woodpecker sign posted at Fort Bragg, NC. www.army.mil. May 19, 2016. Web.

Protecting the Nest

by Ben Davis

Imagine if you got paid to climb tall trees in beautiful, southeastern Oklahoma. I can't help but think, how terrifying, yet what an amazing view. This is typical work for Clay Barnes, wildlife technician, who monitors one of Oklahoma's endangered species, the red-cockaded woodpecker.

He examines trees to find tiny, 3-inch holes, 30 to 40 feet above his head. Signs of occupation are shown by a small hole in a live pine tree, with tree resin trails around the hole.

The red-cockaded woodpecker is an endangered species that has reached the edge of extinction. But, thanks to Barnes and senior biologist Dr. John Skeen, the McCurtain County Wildlife Management Area provides a number of homes for the birds. Every six weeks, Barnes loads his ATV with several sections of ladder, straps on his tool belt, and climbs trees all day to assure the homes are in good condition.

"Few people know there are jobs like mine out there," said Barnes. "It is pretty active management, very involved. It's nice to show the diversity¹ of the Wildlife Department.

Red-cockaded woodpeckers are quite particular. Once a squirrel, wasp, or other animal gets into their hole, they will abandon it. It takes a red-cockaded woodpecker eight months to a year to build a new cavity. Without a hole to nest in, they are at greater risk the entire time they are building new homes.

"We install man-made nest boxes in the trees. We also clean out the holes they aren't using so the birds have somewhere to go if they abandon a nest," said Barnes. He is never quite sure what he'll find inside. "I've found wasps, spiders, slugs, snakeskin, and dirt daubers in the cavities," he said. "Hickory nuts and acorns stored by squirrels are the hardest to fish out. I have to put resin on the end of my wire to clear them out. Sometimes I can clean pretty quickly. Other times take a while because there's so much to dig out."

This particular woodpecker is the only bird in North America that mines cavities in living old-grove pine trees. It prefers park-like settings that are burned frequently to keep the undergrowth² minimal.

"The canopy is thinned and the undergrowth is removed to allow sunlight to reach the ground and open the forest floor," said Barnes. "By reducing canopy cover, it reduces competition from other trees so they get more sunlight and water."

The woodpeckers aren't the only species benefiting from the habitat work. What is good for the woodpecker has also been good for deer, turkey, and quail.

A lot of time, effort, and potential stings are required to maintain habitat³ for the red-cockaded woodpecker. Yet Barnes believes the restoration work being done at Beaver's Bend⁴ is important.

"These birds are endangered because of human impact, so it is our responsibility to get involved and restore their habitat," said Barnes.

Davis, Ben. "Protecting the Nest." Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Information. 8 May 2012. Edited for classroom use, Aug. 2016.

¹ diversity: variety

² undergrowth: low growth of plants on the floor of a forest

³ habitat: the place where an animal naturally lives

⁴ Beaver's Bend: Beaver's Bend State Park in Oklahoma

The red-cockaded woodpecker is a bird which is at risk of becoming extinct. It has been placed on the endangered species list and efforts are being made to protect it so that the species does not disappear forever.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker
(Picoides borealis)
(Federally listed as Endangered)

Description: This bird is a medium-sized woodpecker, about 8.5 inches in length. It has a prominent white patch on each cheek and a black-and-white striped back. The woodpecker's sides and belly are lightly marked with black spots and streaks. The male Red-cockaded Woodpecker has a tiny red patch behind each eye near the ear (the cockade⁵). However, the large white cheek patch is the most conspicuous field mark for both sexes. This species is often mistaken for the Downy Woodpecker which has a white back and a wide black stripe on each side of the head. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers feed on insects which they pick off the bark or trees.

Habitat: Red-cockaded Woodpeckers depend upon large tracts of mature pine woodlands. Preferred habitat consists of mature live pine trees, more than 60 years old. The trees grow in an open woodland condition with a grassy understory.⁶ Nesting and roosting cavities are excavated⁷ in live pine trees. The woodpeckers seek out older trees that have become infected with a fungal disease called redheart disease. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers live in extended family groups that may contain two to five adults. The family groups also include the young from the current year's brood.

Current and Historic Distribution: Currently, there are approximately 15 family groups of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Oklahoma. All of these birds live in southeastern Oklahoma in the McCurtain County Wilderness Area. This area is owned by Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. It is the largest tract of uncut pine forest in the state. Historically, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were more widespread in Shortleaf Pine woodlands in Ouachita Mountains. Outside of Oklahoma, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were once found in pine forests across the southeastern United States. Currently they exist in isolated populations in only eight other states.

Reasons for Decline: Forestry operations and other activities that result in widespread cutting of old-growth timber have limited the availability of suitable habitat for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. This is because it requires mature, living pine trees that are at least 60 years old for nesting. Few areas of old-growth pine remain in the U.S. to provide the habitat required for the species.

"Red-cockaded Woodpecker." *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation*. 2016. Edited for classroom use, Aug. 2016.

⁵ cockade: an ornament worn like a badge on a hat

⁶ understory: the plant layer between the top layer of a forest and the ground cover

⁷ excavated: hollowed out