



Cooperative Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Translocation Strategy Throughout the Southeast

Project # 08-412

Background:

The importance of translocations in saving small, fragmented, and at-risk populations from extirpation has been clearly demonstrated. Its effectiveness in reintroducing Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (RCWs) into new habitats within its historic range has proven this as a viable management tool that serves to accelerate and expand RCW recovery. However, the demand for birds from recipient populations has remained higher than the supply from donor populations. In 1998, the Southern Range Translocation Cooperative (SRTC) was created to coordinate the distribution of the limited number of RCWs available for translocation in the southeastern portion of the species' range.

Objective:

Since the early 1990s, the use of translocations as a management strategy has served to expedite RCW recovery throughout their range (i.e., saving small populations, increasing genetic diversity, reintroductions into vacant habitat). Our objective is to expand translocation efforts regionally by providing additional staffing resources (i.e., translocation biologists) and expanding translocation efforts into South and North Carolina. Specifically, we will:

1. Monitor 100 RCW groups during the nesting season.
2. Band all nestlings of the 100 groups producing nestlings.
3. Conduct roost cavity checks for all subadults fledgling from 100 groups.
4. Trap and translocate at least 20 subadult RCWs from the pool of 100 groups monitored.

The project will directly benefit multiple installations within the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) region, and will be part of a larger effort with expected funds from other SERPPAS partners.

Summary of Approach:

Monitoring for RCW breeding in pre-selected groups began each year in mid-April on the Francis Marion National Forest (FMNF). Active clusters were visited weekly to inspect cavity trees for evidence of a nest or nest preparation. Nest searching was conducted using a pole-mounted, video camera system to visually examine the interior of the nest cavity and its contents. When a nest was located, it was visited weekly to

determine clutch size and age of chicks. Nests were revisited when chicks were approximately 21 days old to determine sex of nestlings (pre-fledge checks) using the video cameras. RCW groups were followed post-fledging to obtain data on the number of chicks successfully fledged, the sex of individual fledglings and group composition. Translocations were conducted each year during the fall within the recommended window of September 15-January 1.

Benefit:

Without translocation, the RCW will not be delisted until at least 2075 as currently projected. Translocation of RCWs to DoD lands will shorten the recovery time, relaxing or removing existing training restrictions. In addition, DoD spends approximately \$7 million annually on RCW recovery. Translocation, and subsequent recovery, would produce a significant cost savings.

Accomplishments:

This project provided 69 additional RCW subadults as a contribution to the allocation available to SRTC during 2008 – 2010, which helped alleviate the supply shortage and even created the opportunity for new populations in SRTC to receive birds. The influx of donor birds also allowed recipient properties that were not slated to receive birds to be allocated pairs while still remaining on the proposed list of recipients for the next year. Recipient populations that were able to receive birds during “off” years especially benefit from the SERPPAS donors since the accelerated rate of augmentation should bring them to 30 potential breeding groups ahead of schedule.

Donor birds from FMNF were received by:

2008 - Military Ocean Terminal-Sunny Point, Fort Jackson, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

2009 - Ocala National Forest, Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center, Talladega National Forest,

2010 - Fort Jackson, USFS-U.S. Department of Energy-Savannah River Site, Poinsett Electronic Combat Range.

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Photo: C Ward Jr (TNC)

