
White-headed Woodpecker

Picoides albolarvatus

Aves — Piciformes — Picidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure (G4)
Statewide: Imperiled (S2)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: Sensitive; Region 4: Sensitive
BLM: Peripheral (Type 4)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Restricted distribution and low population size in Idaho; habitat threats.

TAXONOMY

Two subspecies are recognized. The nominate *albolarvatus* occurs through most of the range of the species. The slightly longer-tailed and larger-billed southern subspecies, *gravirostris*, is restricted to the higher mountains of southern California (Garrett et al. 1996).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The white-headed woodpecker is generally resident in the mountainous regions of the West from south-central British Columbia south through eastern Washington, northeast, central, and south-central Oregon, and in California is primarily inland through the Sierra Nevada south to the highest mountain ranges of southern California (Garrett et al. 1996). Its range extends eastward into western Idaho and west-central Nevada. Populations throughout most of the range are considerably more fragmented than mapped, because of complex topography and localized suitable coniferous forest habitat (R. Dixon, IDFG, pers. comm.). The abundance of this species appears to decrease north of California and it is generally uncommon or rare in Idaho (Garrett et al. 1996). The estimate of population size for this species in Idaho is approximately 320 individuals (Rosenberg 2004).

POPULATION TREND

There are no trend data for Idaho (Sauer et al. 2005). This species, like other woodpeckers, is not well-suited for population trend monitoring by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) because it is mostly vocal early in the spring before surveys are conducted and roadside counts are inappropriate methods for detecting calling birds.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The white-headed woodpecker occupies montane coniferous forests, which are dominated by ponderosa pine in the species' northern range (Garrett et al. 1996). Stands are typically multi-storied and open-canopied mature and old-growth ponderosa pine. This species' status is an indicator of the quality of large-diameter ponderosa pine

habitats, which are used for breeding, roosting, and foraging. Throughout its range, the dominant requisite habitat components are the abundance of large-diameter pine trees (with large cones and abundant seed production), relatively open canopy (50–70%), and availability of snags and stumps for nest cavities (Garrett et al. 1996).

ISSUES

Habitat conversion, including destructive resource harvesting (e.g., clearcutting forests, even-aged stand management, and snag removal), logging, and changes in ecological processes such as fire suppression (which favors the replacement of fir species over ponderosa pine), and forest fragmentation have contributed to local declines of this species, particularly in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho (Garrett et al. 1996). The primary threat to this species is the loss of live and dead large-diameter ponderosa pine.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The white-headed woodpecker remains one of the most poorly studied woodpeckers in North America. Many basic aspects of this species' natural history remain virtually unknown, especially with respect to demography and populations. Metapopulation delineation, determination of reproductive success, and studies of the effects of changing forest tree species composition, stand age, and stature on populations are needed (Garrett et al. 1996). Current population estimates in Idaho need to be refined by comparing continental population estimates with those developed using local data.

