

## A RED-HEADED WOODPECKER AT DRY TORTUGAS

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On 5 May 1973 Mr. and Mrs. G.H. Perbix of Cincinnati and Mrs. Below, members of the tern-banding party then at Dry Tortugas, visited Loggerhead Key and at once noticed an adult Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) in the large Australian Pines (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) near the dock. Coast Guardsmen at Loggerhead Light Station said they had seen the bird for several days. On 6 May Mrs. H.M. Robertson and Ann Robertson of Tampa, Mr. Perbix, and the first author searched Loggerhead Key in the late forenoon, finally found the woodpecker near where it was seen the day before, and watched it for about 15 minutes. It was a typical adult and seemed normally active as it made one long flight and several shorter moves between feeding sites on the trunks and larger branches of live and dead Australian Pines. The bird was silent during both observations. On 7 May observers including Mr. Perbix spent most of the afternoon combing Loggerhead Key for birds. They did not find the woodpecker and saw many fewer spring transient land birds than were there the two previous days.

We find only one other report of the Red-headed Woodpecker at Dry Tortugas. Howell (1932:308) wrote that the species was unknown in the Florida Keys “. . . except for a single occurrence on the Tortugas — a bird seen there on a number of days early in June.” He did not mention the year, the observer, nor a reference citation, and, as far as we can determine, Howell himself never visited Dry Tortugas. We failed to trace the record but it probably was later than 1917, because the Red-headed Woodpecker is not included in a list of Dry Tortugas birds of that date (Bartsch, 1919). Howell's sparsely detailed comment must have been the basis for the A.O.U. Check-List statement (1957: 319), “. . . accidental on the Dry Tortugas, Florida.”

The Red-headed Woodpecker is not known to occur outside the United States but the present record inevitably raises the question: Was the bird migrating across the Gulf or was it merely a vagrant? In either case, the record shows that the species is able to fly long distances over water. Any bird that reaches Dry Tortugas on its own must cross a sea gap of at least 45 miles from the outer Florida Keys, and the closest credible source of vagrant Red-headed Woodpeckers appears to be the Naples area, about 125 miles northeast of Dry Tortugas across open ocean. Records Mrs. Below assembled indicate that a small breeding population exists around Naples, and the recent occurrences farther south in Florida are few and erratic (Kushlan, 1972).

Bent wrote (1939: 209), “The migrations of the Red-headed Woodpecker are imperfectly understood . . .” His comment is particularly apt for the deep Southeast where the species is reportedly less common in winter at many places in Alabama (Howell, 1924; Imhof, 1962), Georgia (Burleigh, 1958), and northwestern Florida (Weston, 1965). Grimes (1972) noted that

most of the local breeding population regularly leaves northeastern Florida in late September and October and Edscorn (1972) that the species appears to migrate north in fall out of central Florida. Much of the migration that these reports imply may cover relatively short distances, and some of it may be merely a seasonal shift of habitat, as from uplands into river swamps. Various Florida records, however, suggest that Red-headed Woodpeckers, occasionally or in small numbers, may migrate south of the United States. These include: Mullet Key, Tampa Bay, 8-27 April 1954 and 9 April 1955 (Stevenson, 1954, 1955); Plantation Key, 15-18 April 1960, the only record from the main Florida Keys (Stevenson, 1960); and Daytona Beach, 24 April 1972 (Kale, 1972). Especially notable are data covering 25 years' observation along the coast south of Tallahassee where the species does not breed and winters only sparingly (Stevenson, pers. comm.). These records from Gulf barrier islands (Dog Is., St. George Is., St. Vincent Is.) and coastal sites most of which are woods isolated by salt marshes (Alligator Pt., St. Marks Light, East Pt., Marshes Is.) show the following seasonal distribution: late September to mid-November, 14 records; mid-November to mid-April, about 17; mid-April to late May, 39. Some observations, such as five birds on Alligator Point after a cold front, 19 April 1969, strongly suggest spring migrants. It seems plain that Red-headed Woodpeckers occur most frequently at the coast and on islands outside their Florida breeding range during spring migration and during weather that grounds migrants. We note, too, that at least one Red-headed Woodpecker has figured in a fall TV tower kill in Florida (Stoddard and Norris, 1967: 57).

The available records fall far short of proof that Red-headed Woodpeckers ever migrate south of the United States, but they suggest that the question should be left open. It may be, as Edscorn (1972) argues, that so conspicuous a species could not have been overlooked, but scattered, silent individuals are not particularly conspicuous and a number of birds that are unknown or virtually so in Cuba and Yucatan are more or less regular migrants at Dry Tortugas. Examples are the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*), Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*), and American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*).

We thank H.M. Stevenson for use of his unpublished records and J.B. Edscorn for comments.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

Beginning with the present issue, the nomenclature and classification of birds followed in the *Florida Field Naturalist* will incorporate the revisions presented in the "Thirty-second Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds" (*Auk*, 90:411-419). Persons preparing notes or articles for publication in our journal are expected to utilize this information.

Participants in the Nest-record Card Program are requested to submit any of their nesting records previously unreported. New volunteers for this program are solicited. Those desiring information about the program should contact Mrs. Edith Edgerton, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

The Editor has a limited supply of tabulated Summer Bird Counts for 1971 and 1972. As long as the supply lasts, they are available to anyone who sends a stamped (16¢), self-addressed envelope.