

Species Snapshot: Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

This is the seventh installment in our regular feature presenting a brief synopsis of the banding and encounter records submitted to the Bird Banding Lab for a particular species. Each installment will feature a new species; suggestions for species to be covered or data to be presented are welcome (swgabrey@gmail.com). Space limitations of **NABB** prohibit any in-depth analysis of the data and these notes are not meant to show any trends in population parameters such as population density or growth rate, geographic distribution, etc. and should not be viewed as a definitive analysis of the status of the species.

Although the banding program began in the 1920s, the currently available digital records for banding data include only those records from 1960 to the present (pre-1960 banding data are available in other formats, however). All encounters, including those of birds banded before 1960, are available in digital format. The following summary includes only those birds banded and encountered from 1960 through Aug 2018 in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

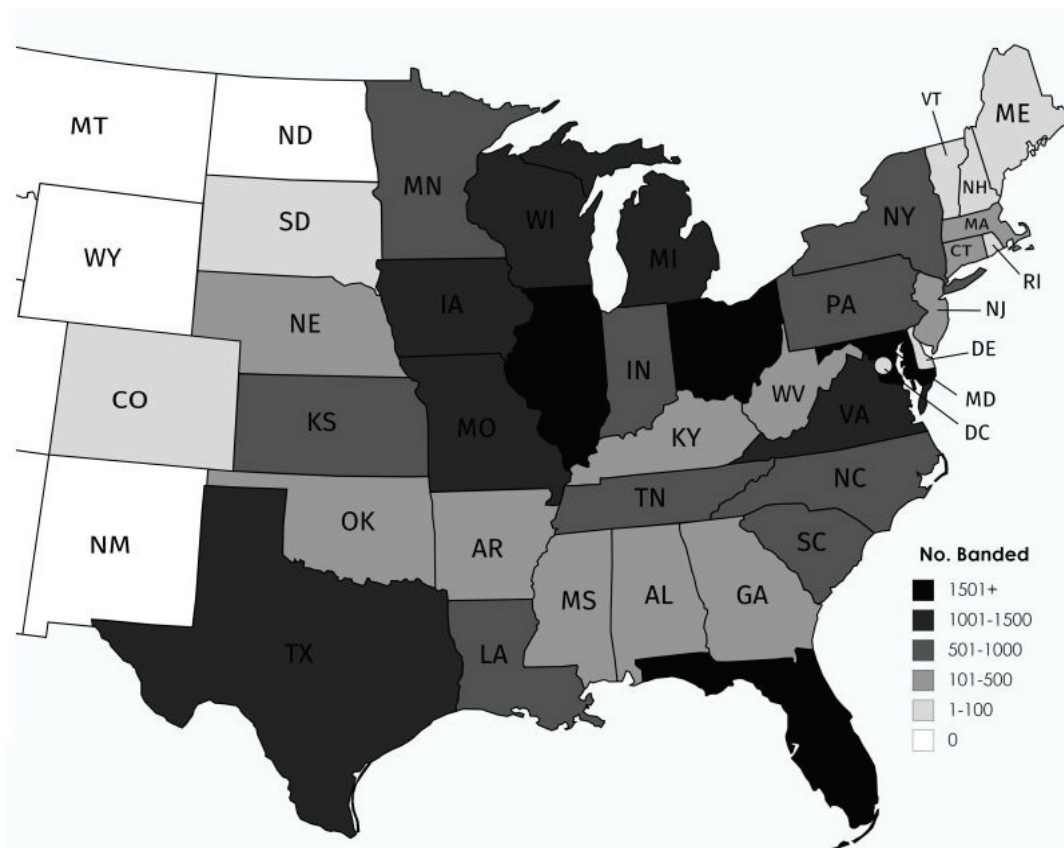


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of banding locations of Red-bellied Woodpeckers in the United States and Canada between 1960 and Aug 2018. Not shown: Ontario (n = 858), Nova Scotia (n = 3), Quebec (n = 2), and New Brunswick (n = 1).

Since 1960, 26,504 Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been banded in the US and Canada (Table 1). Sex was identified (either at banding or upon encounter) for 90% (n = 23,728); of these, 48% (n = 12,723) were males and 42% were females (n = 11,005). Of those banded as males, 75% (n = 9,584) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 19% (n = 2,442) aged as L or HY, and 6% (n = 697) aged as U. Of those banded as females, 79% (n = 8,721) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 15% (n = 1,691) aged as L or HY, and 6% (n = 593) aged as U. Of the 2,776 woodpeckers for which sex was not identified, 18% (n = 497) were aged as ATY, TY, SY, ASY, or AHY compared to 72% (n = 2,008) aged as L or HY, and 10% (n = 271) aged as U.

Banded birds Numbers and Age and Sex Categories

Age code	Banded birds				Encountered birds			
	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
AHY	6,071	5,345	452	11,868	40	54	8	102
HY	2,388	1,657	1,776	5,821	14	3	12	29
L	54	34	232	320	1			1
SY	1,294	1,491	18	2,803	8	3		11
ASY	1,688	1,398	15	3,101	14	6		20
TY	159	146	5	310				
ATY	372	341	7	720	3			3
Unknown	697	593	271	1,561	4	7	6	17
Total	12,723	11,005	2,776	26,504	84	73	26	183

Table 1. Number of Red-bellied Woodpeckers banded and encountered in the United States and Canada between 1960 and Aug 2018 by age at banding and sex (either sex at banding or sex updated upon encounter).

Geographic Distribution

Since 1960, Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been banded in 38 states (n = 25,640) and 4 provinces (n = 864) (Figure 1). The top five states (Maryland, n = 2,418; Florida, n = 2,354; Illinois, n = 1,869; Ohio, n = 1,817; and Iowa, n = 1,231) accounted for about 38% of the banded woodpeckers. Nearly all woodpeckers banded in Canada were from Ontario (n = 858).

Seasonal distribution

About 39% (n = 10,373) of Red-bellied Woodpeckers banded in the United States and Canada were banded between May and Aug, 16% (n = 4,323) between Sep and Oct, 25% (n = 6,567) between Nov and Feb, and 20% (n = 5,238) between Mar and Apr (Table 2).

Country/region	May – Aug	Sep – Oct	Nov – Feb	Mar – Apr	Total
United States	9,866	4,205	6,490	5,079	25,640
Canada	507	121	77	159	864
Total	10,373	4,326	6,567	5,238	26,504

Table 2. Number and seasonal distribution of Red-bellied Woodpeckers banded in the United States and Canada from 1960 through Aug 2018.

Encounters

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories

There have been 188 encounters representing 184 Red-bellied Woodpeckers banded in the United States and Canada between 1960 and Aug 2018. No encounter records had invalid or mismatched sex, age, or species data. No woodpeckers were encountered more than once on the same day. One woodpecker was encountered on the same day as banded; that encounter is not included in the following discussion. Two encounters had a how obtained code of 98 (band only), two had a code of 50 (skeleton/bone only) and one had a code of 56 (written letter); I included these five records in the age/sex and encounter location summaries but did not include them in the longevity or distance between encounter and banding locations summaries. Four woodpeckers were encountered twice; the following summary is based on only the most recent encounter for those birds with multiple encounters.

Sex was identified for 86% of the woodpeckers (n = 157) encountered; 54% were males and 46% females (Table 1). Seventy-seven percent of the males (n = 65) and 86% of the females (n = 63) were banded as AHY, SY, ASY, or ATY. Eighteen percent of the males (n = 15) and 4% of the females (n = 3) were banded as HY or L. Of those woodpeckers for which sex was unknown, 31% were banded as AHY, SY, or AHY (n = 8), 46% (n = 12) as HY or L, and 23% (n = 6) as U.

The oldest Red-bellied Woodpecker encountered was banded as an ATY-M in Mar 2003 in Georgia. This bird was reportedly seen almost daily at a suet feeder in the bander's yard for >9 yr and was last seen in Sep 2012 (minimum age at encounter 12 yr 3 mo). The oldest female (and third oldest overall) was an AHY-F banded in Minnesota in Feb 1964 and recovered after colliding with a stationary object (how obtained code 13) in Jan 1974 in Minnesota (minimum age at encounter 10 yr 7 mo). The oldest woodpecker banded as HY or L (and the eighth oldest overall) was an HY-M banded in Aug 1978 and encountered at the same location as banded in May 1986 (minimum age at encounter 7 yr 11 mo). Thirteen woodpeckers were encountered when at least 7 yr 6 mo old: 5 banded as AHY-F, 2 as AHY-M, 2 as SY-M, and 1 each as ATY-M, ASY-M, ASY-F, and HY-M.

Geographic distribution

All but 4 of the 183 encounters of Red-bellied Woodpeckers occurred in the state in which the bird was banded (Table 3). One hundred fifty of the 183 woodpeckers were encountered within 10 miles of the banding location, 27 between 10 and 100 miles of their banding location, and 6 greater than 100 miles of their banding location. The greatest distance between banding and encounter locations was 233 miles for an AHY-F banded in Virginia in Apr 1988 and found dead in Apr 1989 in Pennsylvania. The greatest distance for a male (and the 4th greatest distance overall) was 153 miles for an ASY-M banded in May 2007 in Ontario and encountered in Jun 2008 in Michigan as a result of striking a stationary object (how obtained code 13). The greatest distance for a bird banded as HY or L (and 2nd greatest overall) was 222 miles for an HY-U banded in Jul 1974 in Missouri and shot (how obtained code 1) in Nov 1975 in Arkansas.

Other interesting encounters

Two of the encountered woodpeckers were raised in captivity/orphaned prior to banding and release (status code = 400). One, an HY-U banded in Georgia in Jun 1992 was caught due to injury (how obtained code 3) 10 miles from its banding location 2 days after release. The other, also an HY-U, was banded in Illinois in Sep 2017 and caught by hand the following day about 1 mile away when the bird "... just flew to our backyard (he looks to be just recently weaned or a juvenile perhaps) and had been perching & pecking on our heads and hands...he is not afraid of humans...we try to minimize contact as much as possible..."

The longest interval between banding and encounter was 11 yr 4 mo for an AHY-M banded in Mar 1968 in Virginia and encountered (photographed while free, how obtained code 52) in Jul 1979 in Virginia (minimum age at encounter 12 yr 1 mo, the second oldest overall). The longest interval between banding and encounter for a female was 9 yr 11 mo (also the oldest female discussed above) and for a bird banded as HY or L is 7 yr 10 mo (the oldest HY or L discussed above).

Only 1 of the 320 woodpeckers banded with an age code of L was later encountered. This was a male banded in West Virginia in Jun 1967 and found dead in Dec 1968, 9 miles from its banding location.

Acknowledgements

I thank the more than 1,500 permit holders who have banded Red-bellied Woodpeckers over the decades, all the individuals who reported encounters, and staff at the Bird Banding Lab for supplying the data.

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Banding State	Same	AR	MI	MO	PA
Florida	40				
Maryland	25				
Minnesota	13				
Illinois	11				
Kansas	9				
Michigan	6				
Alabama	5				
Arkansas	5				
Georgia	5				
Iowa	5			1	
Ohio	5				
Pennsylvania	5				
Texas	5				
Virginia	5				1
Missouri	4	1			
North Carolina	4				
New York	3				
South Carolina	3				
Tennessee	3				
West Virginia	3				
Wisconsin	3				
Louisiana	2				
Mississippi	2				
Oklahoma	2				
Delaware	1				
Indiana	1				
Kentucky	1				
South Dakota	1				
Ontario	2		1		
Total	179	1	1	1	1

Table 3. Banding region and encounter region of Red-bellied Woodpeckers banded and encountered in the United States and Canada between 1960 and Aug 2018 (n = 183).