

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WYOMING

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 210

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Subject: HAIRY WOODPECKER*

General

The hairy woodpecker (Picoides villosus) is a primary cavity nester common in the foothills and mountains of this region during spring and summer.

Food Requirements

Animal matter, especially wood-boring larvae of beetles and moths, adult beetles, and ants, accounts for approximately 75 to 80 percent of the annual diet. Other insects and invertebrates are also eaten. The diet is supplemented by fruit and mast. During fall and winter, hairy woodpeckers in Colorado spent more than 60 percent of the time foraging in the upper crown of ponderosa pine (Pinus ponderosa) feeding on seeds of cones.

Hairy woodpeckers often concentrate in areas of insect outbreaks in response to the increased food source.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Water Requirements

No water requirements were found in the literature.

Cover Requirements

The hairy woodpecker is not associated with any individual tree species or groups of trees. It is usually found in open forests with at least some coniferous trees. During fall and winter, it is common along wooded stream bottoms at lower elevations.

The hairy woodpecker inhabits altered as well as mature forests, such as second-growth or partially-thinned forest stands. Standing dead trees and living trees with decayed heartwood are a necessary habitat component. Hairy woodpeckers excavate holes in the fall to use as roost sites.

Reproductive Requirements

Hairies are primary cavity nesters and may excavate cavities in either dead trees or live trees with at least some central decay. In a review of reported hairy woodpecker nest trees in the Northwest, slightly more than half (17 of 33) of the trees were aspen.

Cavity nesters generally face a shortage of nesting sites since suitable trees often occur in clumps. One study estimated that 180 snags per 100 acres (40 ha) were necessary to support a maximum population of hairy woodpeckers. The minimum dbh of trees and snags used for nesting is 10 in (25.4 cm) and the minimum nest height is 6 ft (1.8m).

Special Habitat Requirements

No special habitat requirements were found in the literature.

Interspersion Requirements

Male and female hairy woodpeckers may maintain separate, but adjacent, territories which are more or less combined during the breeding season. Breeding territories tend to become smaller as one moves south, possibly due to the increased insect availability throughout the year in warmer climates. In Colorado, a territory size of 6 to 9 acres (2.4-3.6 ha) per breeding pair has been reported.

Special Considerations

The hairy woodpecker's food habits make it a beneficial forest bird. Intensive forest management that includes removal of deciduous trees and standing dead trees and periodic thinning may significantly reduce hairy woodpecker populations.