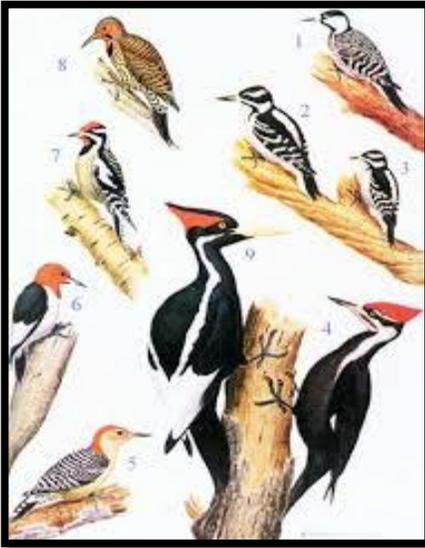


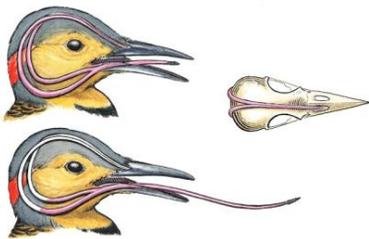
Woodpecker Wonders



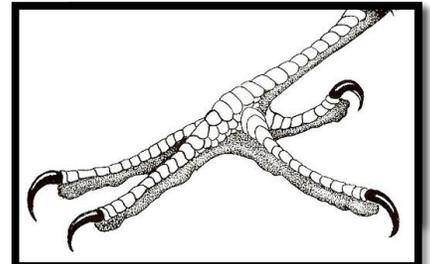
North Carolina is home to eight different types of woodpeckers. This image shows all eight of these woodpeckers. It also shows the Ivory-billed woodpecker (9), which once lived in North Carolina but is now thought to be **extinct**. Red-bellied (5) , Red-headed (6), Pileated (4), and Yellow-bellied sapsuckers (7) have noticeable red on their head. The Northern flicker (8) is brown and gray, rather than black and white. The Hairy (2) and Downy (3) woodpeckers are small and have black and white striped wings. The Red-cockaded woodpecker (1) or RCW* is uniquely adapted to live in the NC longleaf pine ecosystem. We can recognize the RCW by its large white cheek patch. A small red “**cockade**” marking on its head is usually not visible. In order to

survive, the RCW depends on the longleaf pine ecosystem, which can be found in places like Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve.

Wild Woodpecker Adaptations



Woodpeckers have a strong, sharply pointed bill for digging into tree trunks to find insects for food. Their tongue is very long and sticky to help catch insects inside the wood. Woodpecker



feet are zygodactyl. This means that two clawed toes are pointing forward and two clawed toes are pointing backwards helps them climb trees. On the other hand, most birds have three toes pointing forward and one toe pointing backward. Woodpeckers have stiff tail feathers, which support their weight when they press against a tree to drum or **forage**. Many woodpeckers “drum” on tree trunks to communicate with other woodpeckers. A woodpecker’s skull is adapted to absorb the shock of all the pecking. They have a spongy part of their skull behind their **chisel** shaped beak. Their tongues wrap around their skull to protect their brain, much like a bicycle helmet.

RCW Nesting Needs



Red-cockaded woodpeckers prefer to **excavate** nest **cavities** in the trunks of live pine trees, while most woodpeckers hollow out rotting dead trees. Their favorite trees – longleaf pines that are about 80 years old or older – tend to have softer **heartwood** for them to chisel. The RCW chooses an open pine forest to forage for food. RCW's are very social birds, who live in family groups. All birds in the group help with foraging, defending territory, and digging cavities in the trunks of live pine trees. Each RCW must have its own cavity for roosting, or resting at night. One cavity per group is where the female lays between 4 to 8 white eggs. The longleaf pine is the perfect tree to build a cavity in because it will also ooze a **resin** that makes a sticky frame around the cavity entrance. This sticky resin is a protective **barrier** that keeps snakes and other predators out.

Protecting the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem for the RCW

RCWs were once considered very common. Scientists estimate in the 1800's that there were 1.6 million RCW family groups inhabiting the open pine forest from Virginia to Texas. The longleaf pine ecosystem decreased in the last 200 years because of timber harvesting and increased human development. The RCW is an **endangered** species, and it has special protections. Healthy longleaf pine ecosystems also need natural wildfires. Mature longleaf pine trees that the RCWs use are adapted to survive fire. Natural fire also maintains the open area that RCWs use to forage. Park rangers, foresters and biologists set fires in the parks on purpose as a way to restore the open longleaf pine ecosystem. Current RCW populations are more **stable** now because of better fire management and habitat conservation and protection methods being put in place. The future of Red-cockaded woodpeckers and many other species depend on us to protect and restore the longleaf pine ecosystem.



*RCW- an abbreviation for Red-cockaded woodpecker