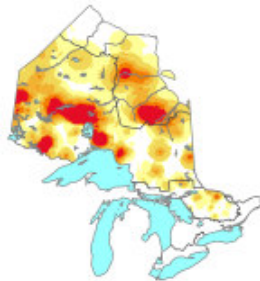


Black-backed Woodpecker Factsheet

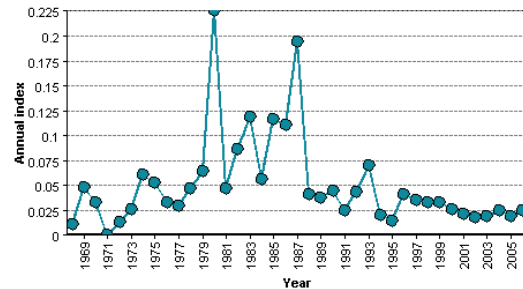
Boreal Bird Toolkit



Black-backed Woodpecker



Relative Abundance



Breeding Bird Survey Index Trend 1968-2006 (Canada)

Description and biology: The Black-backed Woodpecker is a medium-sized woodpecker (23cm) with a completely black back, black upperparts, and white underparts. Distinguishing features of this relatively uncommon species include black and white spotting on primary feathers, black barring on sides and flanks, a white stripe on the side of the face below the eye, and a yellow crown patch on males. It searches coniferous trees and logs for beetle larvae, its main food source.

Habitat requirements: The Black-backed Woodpecker inhabits coniferous areas of the boreal forest, favouring recently burned areas with standing trees. These post-fire areas are excellent sites for invasion by wood-boring insects, which then attract the woodpeckers.

Natural history: When this woodpecker is hammering trees with its beak it will close its eye lids to protect its eyes from the woody debris it dislodges. This species, and its close relative the American Three-toed Woodpecker, differs from other woodpeckers in that they have three toes instead of four.

Conservation status: Of the North American and world population, an estimated 93% breed in Canada's boreal forest. Breeding Bird Surveys reveal that the Black-backed Woodpecker declined significantly by 10.7% per year in Ontario between 1968 and 2006, but has declined nonsignificantly by 1.5% per year between 1968 and 2006 across Canada. Results from the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005) show the species has declined by 9% over twenty years in the Northern Shield region and increased by 6% in the Southern Shield region, although neither figure is statistically significant. Partners in Flight suggest this species would benefit from both continental and regional stewardship.

Environmental threats: Fire management policies, such as fire suppression and prescribed burning, which seek to reduce the occurrence of large wildfires, negatively affect this species by reducing preferred habitat. Post-fire salvage logging similarly reduces the quality and quantity of preferred habitat.

Conservation opportunities: This is a wide-ranging species known to travel great distances in search of suitable habitats and feeding areas. The Black-backed Woodpecker is noted for its particular affinity to burned-over coniferous forest, as well as mature to older-growth intact forests. The species may also feed on insects in downed woody debris left by selection harvesting. To minimize impacts of post-fire salvage operations, maintenance of large numbers of snags is considered beneficial, particularly if snags are clumped and of larger diameter. Maintenance of large landscapes where natural processes, such as wildfire, windthrow, and insect outbreaks, can occur would be beneficial to this species.

Boreal Bird Toolkit:

Toolkit and factsheet: © Wildlife Conservation Society Canada and G.G. Beck Ecological Consulting 2008

Breeding Bird Survey: courtesy Canadian Wildlife Service, volunteers & coordinators; www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/mgbc/trends

Abundance map and point count data: courtesy *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*; www.birdsontario.org

Photo: © Jeff Nadler. See toolkit for literature cited.