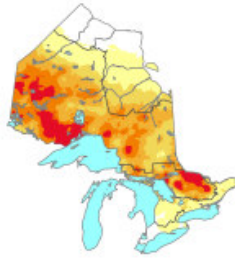


Red-breasted Nuthatch Factsheet

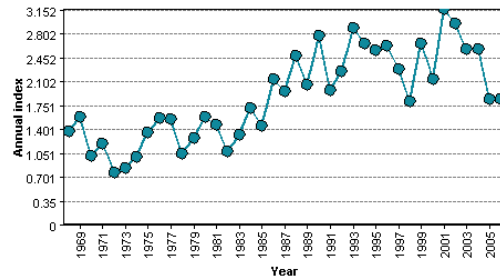
Boreal Bird Toolkit



Red-breasted Nuthatch



Relative Abundance



Breeding Bird Survey Index Trend 1968-2006 (Canada)

Description and biology: The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a small nuthatch (10-12cm) with a black crown, white eyebrow, black eye-stripe, white cheek, bluish grey upperparts, and cinnamon underparts. Typical of nuthatches, the Red-breasted Nuthatch forages on tree trunks and branches for insect prey, as well as feeding on extracted seeds. Adults excavate a nest cavity in various species of live or dead trees, often in wood with some degree of decay.

Habitat requirements: The Red-breasted Nuthatch prefers mature coniferous and mixed woods, especially those dominated by spruce and fir. Trees that are soft enough for nest cavity excavation are a necessary component of the forest.

Natural history: The Red-breasted Nuthatch will put coniferous resin outside the entrance of its nest cavity, applying it with its bill or a piece of bark. It has been suggested that this resin serves to discourage predators and nest-hole competitors from entering the cavity. The Red-breasted Nuthatch avoids the sticky resin by flying directly into the hole. Like other nuthatches, this species moves headfirst down tree trunks – exactly opposite to the pattern used by many other species, including the Brown Creeper.

Conservation status: Breeding Bird Surveys reveal that the Red-breasted Nuthatch increased significantly by 2.6% per year between 1968 and 2006 across Canada, and during the same time period increased by a significant 2.0% per year in Ontario. Results from the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005) show the species has increased significantly by 31% over twenty years in the Northern Shield region and by a significant 12% in the adjacent Southern Shield.

Environmental threats: Collisions with large stationary structures such as tall buildings and towers can cause high levels of mortality. Logging practices and natural fires that remove cone-producing trees reduce the amount of food available for winter, negatively affecting populations. Forestry practices that remove dead or diseased trees affect the Red-breasted Nuthatch since these practices decrease the number of suitable nest sites.

Conservation opportunities: Preservation on the landscape of dead and dying trees is essential to the Red-breasted Nuthatch – forest characteristics which can be maintained through both management or protection measures. Increasing the number of retained snags in cut forest blocks has been shown to benefit the species. The species prefers forests with greater species and structural diversity in comparison to homogeneous, even-aged stands, illustrating the importance of older-growth forests. Retention of “soft” snags (i.e. those with greater decay) is important for this species, and timber management practices that retain only “hard” (i.e. solid) snags for woodpeckers likely do not adequately protect 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: © Tim Stewart. See toolkit for literature cited.