

AN UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF EGGS LAID BY A BREEDING RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER FEMALE

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The Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) is a cooperatively breeding species that typically uses a single cavity for nesting (Ligon 1970, Walters et al. 1988). A single tree, or aggregation of cavity trees, termed the cluster, is inhabited by a group of woodpeckers that includes a single breeding pair and up to several helpers, which are typically male offspring of previous breeding seasons (Ligon 1970, Lennartz et al. 1987). Each group of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers usually produces one nest per breeding season, but will

often nest again during the same breeding season if the first nest fails. Double clutching and double brooding (where both nests are successful) are known to occur in Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the southern and northern portion of the species' range (LaBranche et al. 1994, Franzreb 1997, Phillips et al. 1998).

We studied Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting behavior on the Angelina National Forest (31°N15'N, 94°N15'W) in eastern Texas during the 1998 breeding season. During routine checks of eggs and nestlings in cavities, we discovered that a group (a color-banded breeding pair) on the northern portion of the forest made multiple nesting attempts. The pair attempted to nest three times, each unsuccessful. The pair initially occupied a cluster on the northern portion of the Angelina National Forest. As of 1 May 1998 the pair had completed a clutch of five eggs in tree 503-A. By 4 May, all eggs were gone. By 19 May they had laid a second clutch of four eggs in the same cavity, but by 27 May three of these eggs were broken and one remained intact through 9 June 1998. On 11 June 1998, several southern flying squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*) were in the cavity and all eggs were broken. Following the loss of their second 1998 nest, the pair moved 600 m to a new cluster site to the NNW, and made a third nesting attempt. By 18 June they had three eggs in cavity tree 983-A. The three eggs were still present by 25 June, but had totally disappeared by 1 July 1998 suggesting the possibility of rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*) predation. Thus, during three nesting attempts in 1998, the breeding female laid a total of 12 eggs. During the 1999 breeding season this same female laid a total of seven eggs in two different nest trees (Conner et al. 2001). Red-cockaded Woodpeckers generally lay 2 to 5 eggs per clutch (Bent 1939, Ligon 1970). Jackson (1994) does not give a maximum number of eggs known to be laid by a breeding female during one nesting season.

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