



## **The Black Woodpecker—A Monograph on *Dryocopus martius***

Author: Roberge, Jean-Michel

Source: The Auk, 129(2) : 361-362

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2012.129.361>

---

BioOne Complete ([complete.BioOne.org](https://complete.BioOne.org)) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at [www.bioone.org/terms-of-use](https://www.bioone.org/terms-of-use).

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

---

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

and then up some more in the 2000s is “consistent increase.” Examples include the Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) and House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*).

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) and Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) were among the “consistent decrease,” down and then down some more. Several species showed a “dip,” down and then up. The heavy use of chlorinated hydrocarbons, ca. 1945–1972, is suggested as a possible cause of this pattern in at least some of the species.

A few species showed little change from the 1900s to 2000s. The Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) was spectacularly stable as well as being common in all three sections of the state. The Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) had steady occupancy rates over time but was common in the south, medium in central Illinois, and low in the north.

A related matter is an attempt to pick future winners and losers. Several species, such as the Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*), and Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), are nominated for extirpation in the next 50 years. Nominated to increase in the next 50 years are such species as the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*), Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*), and Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*). Most of those tagged as increasers are southern species destined to move north with global warming. Some are already showing a strong expansionist signal.

For Illinois or elsewhere, maintaining biodiversity of the native avifauna could have two components. One obvious course is retaining natural ecosystems by means of preserves and sanctuaries. The other is managing the rest of the landscape to provide habitat acceptable to the native species. *Illinois Birds* provides evidence in the bird lists of some of the 1900s agricultural lands that this second approach is feasible. Future events may provide evidence that the approach is also essential. Unfortunately, agricultural trends of the past 30 years have mostly run in the opposite direction, toward increasingly hostile landscapes.

Certain types of developed land are the other fraction of today's non-native landscapes where management for native biodiversity might be incorporated. Here the Illinois findings are a little more encouraging. Promising possibilities could be adopted more widely and amplified. The use of native plants in landscaping, including around streams and water bodies, could be increased. Attempts to facilitate nesting could be extended to a great variety of bird species—not just cavity and ledge/platform nesters but many others that have stereotyped nest sites.

In Illinois, as in most places, the acreage of preserved natural areas is small. We might suppose that this relatively small area contains a sizable fraction of the remaining native biodiversity, but *Illinois Birds* has little to tell us on this score. The Forbes technique tends to take the land as it comes (though both the 1950s and 2000s censuses did some supplementary sampling to add acreage of the rarer nearby habitats).

Even if directly applicable data are not available, we might learn something from Dick and Jean Graber's example. Over the course of the Grabers' 30-odd years of travel and study in Illinois, their knowledge of the land and dedication to preserving biodiversity grew. One outcome was that from their modest resources, they bought nearly 500 acres, largely forested, in the Shawnee

Hills above the Ohio River in southern Illinois and eventually donated it to the Illinois Audubon Society as the War Bluff Valley Sanctuary. Jean, still living near the Sanctuary, provided the foreword to *Illinois Birds*.

*Acknowledgments.*—I thank R. Adams, M. A. Sydlik, and K. Takahashi for comments.—RICHARD BREWER, *Department of Biological Sciences, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008, USA. E-mail: brewer@wmich.edu*

---

*The Auk* 129(2):361–362, 2012

© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2012.

Printed in USA.

**The Black Woodpecker—A Monograph on *Dryocopus martius*.**—Gerard Gorman. 2011. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 184 pp., 15 color plates, 22 text figures. ISBN 9788496553798. Hardcover, \$29.00.—Because of their peculiar habits and appearance, woodpeckers (Picidae) figure among the most charismatic birds. This is especially true for the large-sized species belonging to the Campephilini tribe: the logcocks (*Dryocopus* spp.) and ivory-bills (*Campephilus* spp.). The world's most widely distributed representative from that tribe is the Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), which is found across Eurasia, from Western Europe to the Russian Far East and Japan. Unlike some of the other large woodpeckers, the Black Woodpecker is generally not considered threatened with extinction (with a few regional exceptions). So, is there a need for a whole monograph on a bird species that is neither threatened nor hunted as game? Yes, without any doubt. Across its range, the Black Woodpecker has fascinated people for ages. It is the heavyweight woodpecker whose drumming is heard at long distances during cold spring mornings, the evasive black shadow haunting large forests, the woodcarver leaving impressive signs in trees and logs. From a scientific perspective, this species has received much attention in ornithological research, ranking fifth among all the world's woodpeckers in number of scientific articles in the last decade or so (Mikusiński 2006). Still, although some ornithological books provide fairly detailed accounts on the Black Woodpecker (e.g., Cramp 1994), I am not aware of any book in English entirely devoted to this species—that is, before the recent publication of this monograph by Gerard Gorman. It is not surprising that no English-language book has been published on the Black Woodpecker in the past, considering that the species does not occur in any English-speaking country. Still, English is probably the most appropriate language for reaching the variety of potential readers within and outside this woodpecker's distribution range.

In this elegantly written book, Gorman excels at communicating his passion for the Black Woodpecker. He covers virtually all aspects of the species' biology, including taxonomy and relationships, anatomy and identification, behavior, distribution and status, breeding, habitat use at multiple scales, and food and foraging. The book contains an interesting mixture of facts from the scientific literature and personal accounts from observations of the species. Considering that the Black Woodpecker's distribution range stretches over tens of different countries,

reviewing the literature on the species is a challenge. The mission is accomplished: in addition to English papers in scientific journals, this book provides nice coverage of relevant regional literature published in various languages and also builds on personal communications with experts on the species from several countries. As to Gorman's accounts of his own observations of the species, they contribute to vivid descriptions of the woodpecker's behavior.

The book is well thought out, to the extent that it is difficult to think of any major topic of general interest that could be missing. In fact, there is—in my opinion—only one significant weakness to this book: substantial redundancy among the different chapters. For example, one can find nearly identical information about the woodpecker's mammalian predators and secondary cavity users both in chapters about breeding and cavity use and in the chapter addressing relationships with other wildlife. This may be an advantage for readers using the book as a reference work, as it increases the likelihood of finding specific information. Still, those reading the book from cover to cover may get annoyed by such repetitions of facts, which often are presented in very similar forms. An additional drawback is that, although there is a species index at the end of the book, there is no subject index, which means that readers using the book as a reference may need to browse to find the desired pieces of information. However, my opinion is that the qualities of this book—in both content and form—clearly overshadow these limitations.

One major strength of the book is that it reaches far beyond a simple description of the Black Woodpecker's biological features. In that respect, the sections that address relationships between the woodpecker and other species (including humans) are particularly interesting. For example, the book includes a thorough account of the use of Black Woodpecker cavities by other species of birds and by mammals, as well as some information about invertebrates using those cavities. Relationships with humans are also well covered, from cultural aspects (e.g., tales) to conflicts such as damage to buildings inflicted by the woodpecker and possible threats posed by humans. On that latter point, a significant part of the book is dedicated to the effects of commercial forest management. There used to be much concern about the potential effects of forestry on this large woodpecker. However, current knowledge suggests that the Black Woodpecker is fairly tolerant of most common forms of modern forestry, notably through its ability to incorporate separate patches of forest into its home range, to forage in logged areas, and to use some types of degraded forests. Still, Gorman's review of the topic highlights the fact that close-to-nature forestry is more likely to provide suitable habitat than highly intensive forms of industrial forest management.

The book is of appropriate size and has a pleasant general appearance. There are relatively few figures, but the introductory page of each chapter is ornamented by the beautiful artwork of Szabolcs Kókay. Many figures are presented on color plates concentrated at the end of the book. These include a variety of sonograms and oscillograms, color drawings of the Black Woodpecker and its congeners with associated distribution maps, as well as several photographs showing various aspects of the woodpecker's behavior. In some instances it would have been better if those figures had been incorporated in the main text instead of being assembled at the end of the book, but I assume that this would have been problematic from a technical perspective.

A key question is whether this book provides anything more than the detailed accounts of the Black Woodpecker's biology

given in previous works such as Cramp et al. (1994), Winkler et al. (1995), and Gorman (2004). The answer is yes. Undoubtedly, this book is the most comprehensive source of information on the Black Woodpecker published to date. Moreover, it is written in an accessible style, which means that a variety of readers, including professional ornithologists, birdwatchers, and the general public, are likely to enjoy the book. Hence, it would surely make a useful contribution to any university, municipal, or private library.—JEAN-MICHEL ROBERGE, *Department of Wildlife, Fish and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Forest Science, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), S-90183 Umeå, Sweden. E-mail: jean-michel.roberge@slu.se.*

#### LITERATURE CITED

- CRAMP, S., ED. 1994. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom.
- GORMAN, G. 2004. *Woodpeckers of Europe: A Study of the European Picidae*. Bruce Coleman, Bucks, United Kingdom.
- MIKUSIŃSKI, G. 2006. Woodpeckers: Distribution, conservation, and research in a global perspective. *Annales Zoologici Fennici* 43:86–95.
- WINKLER, H., D. A. CHRISTIE, AND D. NURNEY. 1995. *Woodpeckers: An Identification Guide to the Woodpeckers of the World*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

*The Auk* 129(2):362–363, 2012

© The American Ornithologists' Union, 2012.

Printed in USA.

**The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010.**—S. T. Garnett, J. K. Szabo, and G. Dutton. 2011. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Australia. x + 442 pp., 240 range maps. ISBN 9780643103689. Paperback, \$55.00; Kindle, \$44.00.—The purpose of this book is to provide a national overview of the conservation status of birds occurring in Australian territory that meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN 2011) Red List criteria for Extinct, Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Near Threatened. In 2010, these included 238 taxa at the species or subspecies level. Taxa in other IUCN categories are not addressed.

The bulk of the content (409 pp.) is devoted to Conservation Summaries, one for each taxa in these high-risk categories. Each summary begins with a history of previous IUCN status, notes on taxonomy, a description of the range, a range map, notes on abundance, a brief account of relevant ecology, and a brief discussion of threats. The summary then moves on to a table showing the taxon's current eligibility against IUCN criteria, and lists of conservation objectives, information required (e.g., research and monitoring needs), and management actions required. Items in these last three sections are typically both brief and specific, but they lack timelines, costs, or suggestions for who might implement each action.

Each Conservation Summary concludes with a bibliography that typically includes an extensive selection of titles that most of us are not very familiar with. In checking on several of these