Habitat composition and restocking for conservation of the white-backed woodpecker in Sweden

av

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Abstract

In Sweden, intense human land use, especially forestry, has led to profound changes in the landscape over time, especially within the forest ecosystems. A consequence of this is that several specialist species have become endangered. One group of specialists is the woodpeckers. The middle spotted woodpecker became extinct in Sweden in 1982 and the white-backed woodpecker is today Sweden’s most critically endangered forest-living bird. The white-backed woodpecker is dependent on old deciduous forests, rich in dead wood. The woodpecker is area-demanding and hence one of the best indicators or umbrella species for biodiversity in this region. A long-term goal within the conservation of the species is to be able to make more accurate predictions of what is needed in the species habitat to establish a viable population, both in terms of composition of landscape and breeding territories. In addition to earlier studies better tools are needed for measuring the distribution of suitable and potential habitats and finding faster ways of creating optimal habitats. In an attempt to secure the future existence of the white-backed woodpecker in Sweden, restocking of birds are carried out. This presupposes availability of suitable habitats as well as strong enough landscape. Due to intense forestry the presumption for the species is, as stated above, alarming. Comparing the different populations around the Baltic Sea and Norway, great differences but also similarities can be seen, in landscape as well as in territory composition. It seems that fragmentation of foraging patches as well as amount of dead deciduous wood within the breeding territory is critical matters. Grey alder stands in Sweden should have high priority in conservation of habitat for the species.

Keywords: White-backed woodpecker, Dendrocopos leucotos, Sweden, deciduous forest, suitable habitat, fragmentation, saproxylic insects, captive breeding, restocking.

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