VEGETATION STRUCTURE OF RED-HEADED WOODPECKER
(MELANERPES ERYTHRECPhALUS) NEST SITES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
NEST SUCCESS

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We examined vegetation structure of Red-Headed Woodpecker (Melanerpes erythrecphalus) nest sites to determine if differences in habitat influence nest success. Since little is known about the ecology of this species, added with the species’ recent decline in numbers, any information on its ecology could be useful. Important parts of avian ecology are nest selection and the vegetation structure that makes up the nest site. We set out to measure significant vegetation characteristics at and around 35 nest sites at three locations in northeastern Illinois, to determine if any of these variables were related to nest success. These three sites were composed of quality oak savannah habitat, well suited for RHWOs. Thirteen variables were measured at each nest site. Then, variables were compared between successful and non-successful nests. We found no significant correlation between nest success and any of the variables measured. It is possible that vegetation structure simply has no influence on nest success. Most unsuccessful nests are usually due to predation. Few of the nests that failed were definitely predated upon. Typical predators include snakes and flying squirrels. No snakes were found to have predated on any nests, although flying squirrels were observed in nests. Flying squirrels are able to glide great distances to reach nest trees, travel on the ground, and are very adept at tree climbing. Squirrels may be able to successfully predate on nests no matter what kind of structure is present. This could be partly responsible for the lack of difference in vegetation structure between successful and unsuccessful nests.