

## Dead trees add life to the landscape

The circle of life in nature is very complex. We play an important role in the cycle in both our native ecosystems and in home landscapes. One way we can help is by leaving dead trees as “standing snags” for cavity nesting birds.

I am enjoying watching red bellied woodpeckers raise their young in an old oak tree trunk we left standing in the yard. As termites, beetles and fungi inhabit the tree, many other birds are seen perched on the skeleton looking for food or shelter. A smaller black and white downy woodpecker was seen fussing at the parents as if to say hurry up so I can move in and raise my family. Apparently “tree rentals” are in high demand. I have also seen a much larger black and white pileated woodpecker with a red head pounding the trunk with its bill looking for food under the decaying bark.

The hurricanes of 2004 devastated human and animal homes when trees came down. As an advocate for tree canopy for shade at home, I encourage homeowners to maintain adequate insurance in the event that trees damage structures. Proper pruning practices, tree species selection and tree placement can result in shade that reduces electric bills during our hot summer months with minimal risk to homes and buildings.

Strong hurricane winds have destroyed trees which provide important nesting and resting habitat for birds. While some birds require live trees for nests, others only nest in cavities built in dead trees. Some birds, such as bluebirds will adapt to artificial cavities known as bird houses.

When leaving dead or damaged trees in the yard for wildlife habitat, an arborist can remove the bulk of the tree and leave stubs of the main branches for perches for large hawks, kestrels, ospreys and owls. They often look for high vantage points when they hunt for prey. Male cardinals and mocking birds may use them as lookout perches to sing for a mate or watch for predators so they can warn their family of danger.

Some birds such as woodpeckers are primary nesters and dig out the wood to create a nest entrance. Other birds are secondary occupants and move in after the other birds have raised a family. Learn more about tree selection and care, cavity nesters, and landscaping for wildlife habitat by contacting the UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County Master Gardeners at 321-697-3000 or search <http://solutionsforyourlife.com>

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Downy woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, red bellied woodpecker

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