

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

LEWIS' S WOODPECKER

Melanerpes lewis

Family: PICIDAE
B294

Order: PICIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: T. Harvey, G. Ahlborn
Reviewed by: N. Johnson
Edited by: G. Ahlborn

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon, local winter resident occurring in open oak savannahs, broken deciduous, and coniferous habitats. Found along eastern slopes of the Coast Ranges south to San Luis Obispo Co. Also winters in the Central Valley, Modoc Plateau, and the Transverse and other Ranges in southern California. Breeds locally along eastern slopes of the Coast Ranges, and in the Sierra Nevada, Warner Mts., Klamath Mts., and in the Cascade Range.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Forages primarily on insects in spring and summer. In summer, 60% of feeding time was spent hawking insects, 30% foraging on ground and in brush, and 10% gleaning insects from trunks and branches of trees (Bock 1970). In late summer and fall, fruits and berries eaten frequently. Winter food mostly cached acorns, other nuts and seeds, and emerging insects. Caches acorns and other nuts in crevices and holes for use in nonbreeding season.

Cover: Requires open habitats with scattered trees and snags with cavities. Cover provided by cavities and foliage of trees and shrubs.

Reproduction: Excavates nest cavity in snag or dead part of live tree, usually 1.5 to 24 m (5-80 ft) above ground (Bock 1970, Raphael and White 1984). Usually nests in sycamore, cottonwood, oak, or conifer. May nest near other pairs.

Water: No data found.

Pattern: Suitable habitat includes open, deciduous and conifer habitats with brushy understory, and scattered snags and live trees for nesting and perching (Bock 1970). Uses logged and burned areas. Prefers oaks and acorns in winter.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Tends to wander in fall. Distance travelled depends on proximity of suitable habitat and acorn and other nut supplies. May form nomadic flocks in late summer and fall; moves into orchards, or moves higher in mountains (Bock 1970). Mountain populations usually move to lower areas for winter.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Nesting territory for a pair was 6 ha (15 ac), probably represented immediate vicinity of nest and feeding area (Bock 1970). Defends acorn and nut stores in fall and winter.

from conspecifics, acorn woodpecker, and other woodpeckers.

Reproduction: Breeds from early May through July, with peak in late May and early June. Clutch size 4-9, usually 6-7. Incubation probably 13-14 days; fledging occurs at 28-34 days. Male incubates and broods at night; pair alternate in daytime. Pair bond may be permanent.

Niche: Loss of habitat and nest sites to land cultivation and development has reduced breeding population in northern California (Bock 1970). Competition with acorn woodpeckers for stored mast has been reported (Bock 1970).

REFERENCES

- Bock, C. E. 1970. The ecology and behavior of the Lewis woodpecker (*Asyndesmus lewis*). Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool. 92:1-100.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Jackman, S. M., and J. M. Scott. 1975. Literature review of twenty three selected forest birds of the Pacific Northwest. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Reg. 6, Portland OR. 382pp.
- Raphael, M. G., and M. White. 1978. Avian utilization of snags in a northern California coniferous forest. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Reg. 5, San Francisco. Prog. Rep. 18pp.

B294

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.