

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

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER

Picoides scalaris

Family: PICIDAE
B301

Order: PICIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: D. Gaines
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Fairly common yearlong resident in Mojave and Colorado deserts below about 1600 m (5000 ft), rarely to 1900 m (6000 ft), from the vicinity of Walker Pass, Kern Co. and southern Inyo Co. south to Mexico border. Preferred nesting habitats include desert wash, desert riparian, and palm oasis, but also ranges into Joshua tree and occasionally pinyon-juniper (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Drills for wood-boring beetles and other insects in trees, shrubs, cacti, yucca, agave. Also gleans caterpillars, ants, and other insects from trunks and foliage. Reported to feed occasionally on cactus fruits (Bent 1939, Austin 1976).

Cover: Roosts and nests in snag, dead portion of live tree, shrub or cactus, utility pole, or fence post.

Reproduction: Excavates a cavity about 25 cm (10 in) deep in Joshua tree, flowering stalk of yucca or agave, cottonwood, willow, mesquite; usually 0.6-6 m (2-20 ft) above ground (Bent 1939).

Water: No additional data found, but frequents riparian habitats.

Pattern: Inhabits virtually all desert habitats that provide large shrubs or trees, and suitable sites for nest excavation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: None reported.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Probably territorial, but no information found.

Reproduction: Usually lays eggs in April and May. Monogamous; incubation about 13 days, by both sexes. Clutch averages 4-5 eggs (range 2-7). Both sexes care for altricial young. Fledging age unknown (Bent 1939, Harrison 1978).

Niche: Apparently little overlap between sexes in foraging. Female tends to feed higher and on different substrates; male tends to forage more by probing and pecking, female by gleaning (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: Detailed life history information apparently lacking. Range overlaps marginally with Nuttall's woodpecker.

REFERENCES

- Austin, G. T. 1976. Sexual and seasonal differences in foraging of ladder-backed woodpeckers. *Condor* 78:317-323.
- Bent, A. C. 1939. Life histories of North American woodpeckers. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 174. 334pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. *Birds of southern California*. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna* No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. *A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds*. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Harrison, C. J. O., ed. 1978. *Bird families of the world*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. 264pp.
- Short, L. L. 1971. Systematics and behavior of some North American woodpeckers, Genus *Picoides* (Aves). *Am. Mus. Nat. Hist. Bull. No. 145*. 118pp.

B301

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHHR) 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.