BIOLOGY, LEGAL STATUS, CONTROL MATERIALS AND DIRECTIONS FOR USE

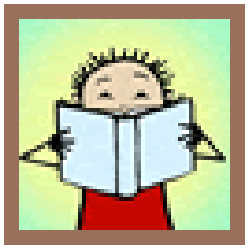
Woodpeckers and Common Flicker

Acorn Woodpecker - *Melanerpes formicivorus*

Lewis' Woodpecker - *Melanerpes lewis*

Common Flicker - *Colaptes auratus*

Family: Picidae

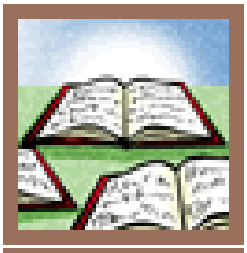


Introduction: Woodpeckers are found worldwide and include about 180 species. Woodpeckers gained their English name because of the habit of some species of tapping and pecking noisily on tree trunks with their beaks. This is both a means of communication to signal possession of territory to their rivals and a method of locating and accessing insect larvae found under the bark or in long winding tunnels in the tree. Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*) are a medium-sized member of the woodpecker family. They are native to most of North America, one of the few woodpecker species that migrates, and the only woodpecker species that commonly feeds on the ground.

Identification: Seventeen species exist in California, including sapsuckers and flickers. From 5 ¾ to 15 inches long. All have strong, sharply pointed bill for chipping and digging in tree trunks and branches for insects. They use the tail as a prop. Some woodpeckers have zygodactyl feet, meaning they have two toes pointing forward, and two backward. These feet are adapted for clinging to a vertical surface, and can be used for grasping or perching. Several species have only three toes. Males and females look slightly different. The male typically has a red patch either on the back of the head or on the face. The flicker is a jay-sized woodpecker with brown back and white rump, usually salmon red under the wings but occasionally yellow. Further information including audio is available at:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



Legal Status: Acorn woodpeckers, Lewis' woodpeckers and common flickers are classed as migratory nongame birds in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations. They may be controlled under a depredation permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

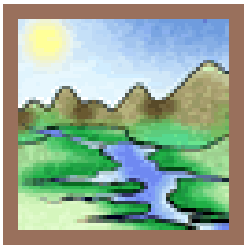
Damage: Almonds, apples; inflicts structural damage to wooden buildings, drilling into sidings and shingles or under eaves looking for food or to excavate a nest chamber. Also damages fences, poles, and other wooden structures. Characteristic drumming on buildings may create annoying noise.

Range: Most woodpeckers are permanent residents in California. Lewis' woodpecker is an exception; it breeds from central British Columbia south to south-central California and winters from northern Oregon to northern Mexico. The acorn woodpecker is found throughout the state where habitat is suitable and the flicker is found in all areas except desert regions.

Acorn Woodpecker

Lewis' Woodpecker

Northern Flicker



Habitat: The acorn woodpecker is found in oak woods, groves, mixed forest, oak-pine canyons, and foothills. The flicker is found in more open woods, riparian forests, farms, suburbs, and canyons. Lewis' woodpecker generally breeds in open country with large dead trees or in burned forests where high stumps remain; it winters in a variety of forested areas.

Biology: Lewis' woodpecker usually builds its nest in a dead, fire-scorched tree stump. Five to nine eggs are laid, usually six or seven, and incubation takes about 14 days. Age at first flight is unknown. Acorns comprise about one-third of their diet; wild berries and other fruits and nuts account for the remaining vegetable food. Insects are frequently taken on the wing as well as from trees and on the ground. Lewis' woodpecker is gregarious and flocks of 50 or more migrants are not uncommon. Lewis' is a noticeably silent woodpecker except during mating season.

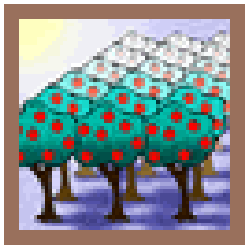
Its straight, crow-like flight differs from the undulating pattern of most other woodpeckers.

The acorn woodpecker, as its name suggests, subsists largely on acorns during fall and winter. Acorns and almonds are stored in holes drilled in trees, fence posts or telephone poles. Besides nuts and acorns, this woodpecker eats berries and other fruits, as well as ants, beetles, other insects, and tree sap.

Both sexes aid in excavating a nest, preferably in an oak tree. Four to six eggs are laid usually four or five and incubation lasts about 14 days. Age at first flight is unknown. The acorn woodpecker is sociable and often gathers in small colonies, sometimes with more than one pair nesting in the same tree or even in the same hole.

Flickers excavate a nest in a soft-wood tree, post, or building. Five to ten eggs are laid, with incubation lasting 11 to 12 days. Age at first flight is 25 to 28 days.

Unlike other woodpeckers, flickers feed to a great extent on the ground where fallen seeds, insects, and wild berries are found. Forty-five percent of the food taken during the year consists of ants; as many as 5,000 being found in one bird. The tongue can be extended 2 ½ inches beyond the bill and it is covered with a sticky substance, enabling efficient use when it is inserted into nests of ants and other ground breeding insects. Twenty-eight percent of the diet consists of insects other than ants, and the remaining 30 to 40 percent is wild fruits and seeds. Flickers sometimes annoy homeowner by making nest holes under the eaves or drumming on the roof in the early morning hours.



Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Frightening Devices: Woodpeckers and flickers are quite persistent and frightening devices usually have little practical value against these birds. However, dangling foil strips 2 to 3 inches wide and 3 feet long hung under eaves or fascia board of a building have been reported to have discouraged woodpeckers for a short period of time.

Repellents: Sticky or tacky bird repellents have been reported effective against woodpeckers and flickers where they are causing damage to buildings. Some of these sticky repellents will discolor painted, stained or natural wood siding. They also may run in warm weather, leaving unsightly streaks.

Netting: Netting is an effective method of excluding woodpeckers and flickers from damaging wood siding beneath the building eaves. The netting should be attached leaving at least five inches of space between the netting and damaged building. The netting can be attached to overhanging eaves and angled back to the siding below the damaged area and tautly secured. If installed properly, the netting is barely visible from a distance and will offer a long-term solution to the damage problem.

Metal Barriers: Metal sheathing or hardware cloth placed over areas damaged by woodpeckers and flickers offer permanent mechanical protection from continued damage. The material should be installed when damage first appears.

Shooting: Not recommended. Could only be used under a depredation permit.

Trapping: Trapping by means of a wooden base rat trap can be effective if allowed under the depredation permit. Secure the trap to the building where the bird is working, with the trigger of the trap pointing down; bait it with suet or nut meats.

Toxic Bait: None registered for woodpecker control.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

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