

ACORN WOODPECKER PREDATION ON THE WESTERN FENCE LIZARD IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

JACKSON D. SHEDD, The Nature Conservancy, Dye Creek Preserve, 11010 Foothill Blvd., Los Molinos, California 96055; jshedd@tnc.org

During the summer Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) have been observed to subsist on foods other than stored dried acorns (MacRoberts 1970), and reasons for this seasonal dietary shift correlate strongly with the need of the young for high-protein food (Koenig et al. 2008). This species has been documented to consume a variety of foods in addition to acorns, including sap (MacRoberts 1970), oak catkins, fruit, annual grains (MacRoberts and MacRoberts 1976), insects (Bent 1939, MacRoberts 1970, Koenig et al. 2008), and the eggs of both conspecifics (Mumme et al. 1983) and other birds (Bryant 1921, Fajer et al. 1987). In addition to enumerating the aforementioned dietary items, MacRoberts (1970) commented that he did observe one Acorn Woodpecker consume a lizard, “probably *Sceloporus occidentalis*” (the Western Fence Lizard), along the central coast of California. Although the Western Fence Lizard may have been the most likely lizard species at that particular study site, the identification was not confirmed. Furthermore, MacRoberts remarked “whether the lizard was alive or dead when it came into the woodpecker’s possession is unknown.”

At 11:40 on 26 June 2014, I observed a Western Fence Lizard being preyed upon by an Acorn Woodpecker (sex undetermined) at the main headquarters of Dye Creek Preserve, Los Molinos, Tehama County, California (40.1029° N, 122.0466° W, elevation 113 m). I initially observed the lizard traversing an exposed location on open ground away from the rock perches where this species is typically seen around the headquarters, as if it were dispersing from one group of rocks to another. Soon after my initial observation of the lizard, an Acorn Woodpecker flew down to the ground, landing 1 m from the lizard, which had become completely immobile in response to the bird’s approach. The woodpecker searched around on the ground for a few seconds and the lizard then moved slightly, at which time the woodpecker made its final detection and captured it. The woodpecker then immediately flew away with the lizard in its bill and perched on a nearby telephone pole (~20 m from the site of capture), where I had another clear view of the lizard. From there, the woodpecker flew to another, higher telephone pole ~50 m from that pole, with its quarry still in its bill.

This report confirms two things regarding the feeding ecology of *Melanerpes formicivorus*: that Acorn Woodpeckers do opportunistically consume Western Fence Lizards as prey during the warm summer season, and they will do so by actively hunting live individuals. Furthermore, given that the diet of breeding adult Acorn Woodpeckers has been estimated to consist of 90% acorns (Koenig et al. 2008) and that the predation I observed occurred during the nesting season, the lizard may have been fed to nestlings because of its high protein content.

I thank Walter D. Koenig for his helpful feedback and encouragement to publish this observation.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bent, A. C. 1939. Life histories of North American woodpeckers. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 174.
Bryant, H.C. . 1921. Acorn Woodpecker eats the egg of a Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*). Condor 23:33.

NOTES

- Fajer, E. D., Schmidt, K. J., and Eschler, J. G. 1987. Acorn Woodpecker predation on Cliff Swallow nests. *Condor* 89:177-178.
- Koenig, W. D., Schaefer, D. J., Mambelli, S., and Dawson, T. E. 2008. Acorns, insects, and the diet of adult versus nestling Acorn Woodpeckers. *J. Field Ornithol.* 79:280-285.
- MacRoberts, M. H. 1970. Notes on the food habits and food defense of the Acorn Woodpecker. *Condor* 72:196-204.
- MacRoberts, M. H., and MacRoberts, B. R. 1976. Social organization and behavior of the Acorn Woodpecker in central coastal California. *Ornithol. Monogr.* 21:1-115.
- Mumme, R. L., Koenig, W. D., and Pitelka, F. A. 1983. Reproductive competition in the communal Acorn Woodpecker: Sisters destroy each other's eggs. *Nature* 306:583-584.

Accepted 21 October 2014



Acorn Woodpecker

Sketch by Narca Moore-Craig