

FIRST RECORD OF THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER IN NEVADA

KENNETH M. BURTON, P. O. Box 1038, Arcata, California 95518;
shrikethree@gmail.com

LESLIE SCOPES ANDERSON, 64 E. 14th St., Arcata, California 95521

On the afternoon of 12 June 2012 Anderson found an unfamiliar woodpecker in cottonwoods (*Populus* sp.) near the Bressman Historic Cabin at Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Elko County, Nevada (40.2° N, 115.4° W). She observed the bird for approximately 20 minutes as it foraged, during which time she obtained several excellent photographs from which she was able to identify it as a female Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*).

Because Anderson did not realize the significance of her find, she did not report it. Two days later she shared a photo with Burton, who suspected it represented a first state record and notified the Nevada Bird Records Committee. The committee's secretary, Martin Meyers, posted the sighting on the state birding e-list, but by then several days had elapsed and the bird was not refunded. On the basis of Anderson's



Figure 1. Female Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) at Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Nevada, 6 June 2012; ventral view.

Photo by Leslie Scopes Anderson

NOTES



Figure 2. Female Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) at Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Nevada, 6 June 2012; dorsal view.

Photo by Leslie Scopes Anderson

definitive photographs, however, the committee subsequently voted unanimously in the first round to accept the record (2012-030), and it stands as the first for Nevada (M. Meyers pers. comm.).

The photos clearly show the combination of red nape and nasal tufts; white-barred back and central rectrices; gray face, crown, and underparts; and nearly concealed red belly patch diagnostic of a female Red-bellied Woodpecker (Figures 1 and 2). The similar female Golden-fronted Woodpecker (*M. aurifrons*) has yellow head patches,

NOTES

black central rectrices, and no belly patch. Some of the photos appear to show worn, brown primaries contrasting with fresher, blacker secondaries and secondary coverts, suggesting a bird in its first plumage cycle; during the preformative molt, a small proportion of individuals retain a variable number of outer primaries, while subsequent molts include all primaries (Pyle 1997).

The Red-bellied Woodpecker's normal range extends from the eastern United States up river valleys onto the Great Plains as far west as extreme northeast Colorado (South Platte River; Winternitz 1998), approximately 1100 km due east of Ruby Lake. Since the mid-1900s, the species has expanded its range north and west, likely as a result of climate change and supplemental feeding (Shackelford et al. 2000); Breeding Bird Survey data show strong population increases from 1966 to 2010 across most of its range (Sauer et al. 2011). Like most other woodpeckers, it is essentially nonmigratory (Shackelford et al. 2000), although northern populations are prone to some southward movement during cold winters (Winkler et al. 1995), and it is at that season that vagrants may be expected. In fact, there is a limited pattern of winter records west of the breeding range (e.g., at least two for Alberta and one for Idaho; <http://birdscalgary.wordpress.com>, <http://geobirds.com>, <http://idahobirds.net>), and it may be expected that continued population growth will result in an increase in extralimital records. A Red-bellied Woodpecker in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in the winter of 2002–2003 (Rogers 2003) is the only one recorded west of Ruby Lake, and there are no records in any of the other states bordering Nevada. The June date of the Ruby Lake bird makes the sighting all the more remarkable.

We thank Kristie Nelson and Daniel D. Gibson for reviewing the manuscript.

LITERATURE CITED

- Pyle, P. 1997. Identification Guide to North American Birds, part 1. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, CA.
- Rogers, T. H. 1993. Idaho–western Montana region. *Am. Birds* 47:278–279.
- Sauer, J. R., Hines, J. E., Fallon, J. E., Pardieck, K. L., Ziolkowski, D. J., Jr., and Link, W. A. 2011. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966–2010, version 12.07.2011. U.S. Geol. Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.
- Shackelford, C. E., Brown, R. E., and Conner, R. N. 2000. Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), in *The Birds of North America* (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.), no 500. Birds N. Am., Inc., Philadelphia.
- Winkler, H., Christie, D. A., and Nurney, D. 1995. Woodpeckers: A Guide to the Woodpeckers of the World. Houghton Mifflin, New York.
- Winternitz, B. L. 1998. Red-bellied Woodpecker, in *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas* (H. E. Kingery, ed.), pp. 252–253. Colo. Bird Atlas Partnership and Colo. Div. Wildlife, Denver.

Accepted 24 February 2013