

Lewis' Woodpecker

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Scientific Name: *Melanerpes lewis*: *Melanerpes* from the Greek *melan*, meaning black, and *herpes*, meaning creeper. Ornithologist Alexander Wilson named the bird "lewis" for Meriwether Lewis because the skins Wilson used were provided by the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Description Both sexes of this species are distinguishable by a blackish-green head, back, wings, and tail; a silver collar and upper breast; a red face; and a dark pink lower breast and belly. Their bill is black and their legs and feet are gray. Males tend to be a little larger than females, though the difference is slight and they cannot be reliably sexed by size. Birds average 10 to 11 centimeters in length. Juveniles appear darker and more brownish black than adults, and they lack the gray, red, and pink coloration that easily distinguishes this bird from other woodpeckers. The bird's jaylike flight can mislead observers.

Habitat Closely associated with ponderosa pine woodlands throughout the western United States, Lewis' woodpeckers seek out settings that offer a brushy understory, open foraging areas, and snags for perching. These requirements are often met in recently burned forests. Alternately, they will inhabit riparian areas, particularly in low elevations, and are also known to occur in oak woodlands, especially in the fall and winter.

Distribution Lewis' woodpeckers occur throughout the western United States from western South Dakota to northwestern California. They breed as far north as southern British Columbia and as far south as central

New Mexico. In Arizona they can be commonly encountered in the White Mountains, including near Alpine, Eagar, Greer, and Hannagan Meadow,



and in the Flagstaff vicinity near Mormon and Kinnikinick lakes and near Sunset Crater.

Biology Lewis' woodpeckers reside year round in Arizona, but make seasonal movements within the state coinciding with breeding habits and food availability. They generally begin courtship in March and raise young

through June, July, and sometimes as late as early August. Local migrations in Arizona take place midfall or early winter. During these movements, the birds form flocks comprised of both adult and first-year birds.

Females lay six or seven eggs in nest holes prepared with a bed of wood chips in the trunk or a sizable branch of large dead or dying trees such as ponderosa pine, cottonwood, willow, or other species. Both parents feed the young for 38-44 days when they depart from the nest. The birds will return to the same nest to raise their single annual broods year after year.

Like other woodpeckers, Lewis' eat primarily insects, augmented by acorns and other nuts in the winter. These birds "fly catch," meaning they take insects in flight, as well as glean insects from tree leaves and branches. They generally do not excavate for wood-boring insects as is usually associated with woodpeckers.

Status Sporadic distribution makes trend or population estimates difficult to produce. However, Lewis' woodpeckers are still found throughout their historical range in Arizona.

Management Needs Lewis' woodpeckers have no special designation and are not in need of specific management actions beyond conservation of their preferred habitats, including preservation of "snags," or standing dead trees. ♣

As the Arizona Bird Conservation Initiative Coordinator, wildlife specialist Jennifer Martin works toward the conservation of all bird species.