



Blue-listed species

are considered vulnerable because they have characteristics that make them particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events.

Lewis's Woodpecker

Melanerpes lewis

At a Glance

With its greenish-black back, pink belly, grey collar and red face, Lewis's Woodpecker is easy to recognize. It is a fairly large woodpecker. Its body is 26 to 29 centimetres long, its wingspan is about 50 centimetres and it weighs 100 to 120 grams. The male is slightly larger than the female. Lewis's Woodpeckers are quiet birds, except for the occasional harsh "churrrr" call. Most woodpeckers have a "bounding" flight, meaning that they lift and fall with each wingbeat, but Lewis's Woodpecker flies in a steady, even line like a crow. This flight pattern, together with its dark colouring, has earned it the nickname "crow woodpecker."

Home Sweet Home

In the southern interior of British Columbia, this woodpecker's favourite habitat is open ponderosa pine forest, especially near water or in areas that are recovering from fire. Within these forests, they need bushy areas, where they can find plenty of food, and large dead trees (or snags) for nesting. Live black cottonwoods may also be used for nesting, particularly when they are near ponderosa pine stands.

Lewis's Woodpeckers nest in holes. Like most woodpeckers, they can use their large, strong bills to excavate nest cavities, but sometimes they use an abandoned flicker nest cavity or a natural opening in a decaying trunk instead. They often use the same nest site year after year. In some locations, they may nest in loose colonies. Sometimes more than one pair will nest in separate cavities in a single tree.

This is the Life

In British Columbia, Lewis's Woodpeckers lay four to six white eggs in May or June. In some other places they may lay as many as seven. The eggs hatch in about two weeks, and the young leave the nest about four weeks later.

What's on the Menu?

Lewis's Woodpeckers eat a wider variety of food than many other woodpeckers. Their diet includes fruit, nuts, corn, ants, tent caterpillars, grasshoppers and many kinds of flying insects. They forage in the air, on the ground, and in trees. They often poke into crevices and chips at the bark of trees, searching for insects. Unlike some other woodpeckers, however, they do not chisel deep holes into the wood.

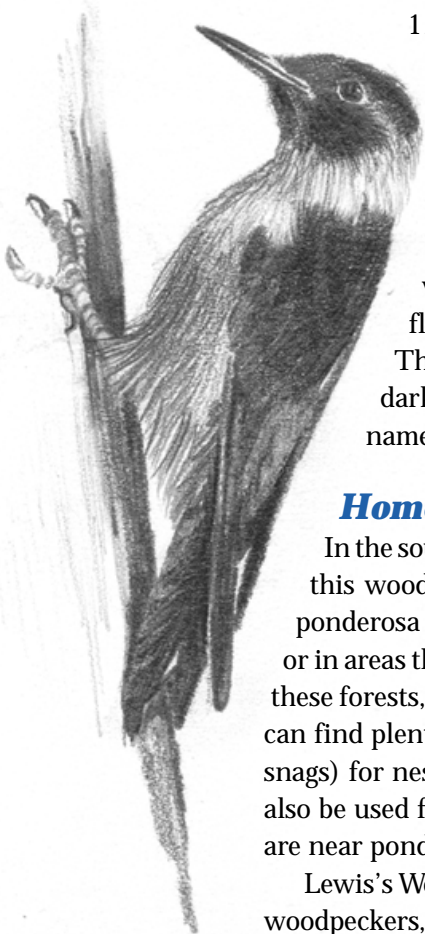
Where and When

Lewis's Woodpeckers are migratory. They spend the winter as far south as Mexico. In summer, they breed from Arizona and California northwards to southern British Columbia and southwestern Alberta. In British Columbia, they are most commonly found in the Okanagan Valley. A few Lewis's Woodpeckers stay in this area all year, but most are only here for the breeding season. In late summer, they are sometimes found in flocks prior to migration.

Outside the Okanagan Valley, they are likely to be found wherever there are mature ponderosa pine forests. They are very rarely seen on the south coast. Only about 1000 to 2000 Lewis's Woodpeckers live in British Columbia.

How They're Doing

In the past, Lewis's Woodpecker was an abundant breeding species around Vancouver and Victoria,





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NO KIDDING!

Like squirrels, Lewis's Woodpeckers collect and store acorns, but they do not bury them in holes in the ground. Instead they push them into holes in tree trunks or cracks in the bark. A closely related woodpecker, the Acorn Woodpecker, also does this. One tree used by Acorn Woodpeckers for storage contained 50 000 acorns! Where Lewis's and Acorn Woodpeckers live in the same area, they compete for acorns.



Lewis's Woodpeckers have a special way of capturing flying insects that is quite unusual for a woodpecker. They sit and wait on a snag or post, then suddenly dart out and snatch their prey from the air. This behaviour is known as "hawking." Sometimes they swoop down to the ground and pounce on grasshoppers or other insects.



Both parents share the chore of incubating the eggs. At night, however, only the male sits on the eggs, while the female sleeps in another cavity. No one knows why this is.



One living ponderosa pine tree in the East Kootenays was found to be home to three pairs of Lewis's Woodpecker in 1997. This was the first occurrence of a triple-nest tree reported in B.C.



but by 1964, they were all gone. The reason for this seems to have been the loss of tall old snags needed for nesting and lookouts. Most of these were eliminated by logging and development of land for housing. On Vancouver Island, they were probably also affected by the loss of Garry oak woodlands and the acorns they provided. Populations of Lewis's Woodpecker in the southern interior of British Columbia have also declined over the years. Logging, and clearing of land for farms and houses are the main causes. However, a 1997 inventory in the East Kootenays found more breeding pairs than expected: over 40 active nests were discovered. Still, because of declining habitat, Lewis's Woodpecker is considered vulnerable and has been placed on the provincial Blue List.

How We're Helping

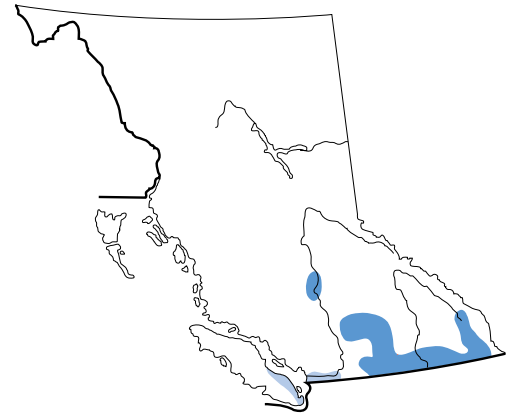
This species is protected under the British Columbia *Wildlife Act* and the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. Some Lewis's Woodpeckers nest in protected areas, but many live on private lands where the co-operation of landowners is needed to preserve their habitat. Education programs, such as Project Wild and workshops presented by the Wildlife Tree Committee, benefit this species and others. Draft management guidelines have been prepared to maintain nesting habitat on public land as part of the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy under the Forest Practices Code. Stewardship and Naturescape programs help them on private lands.

How You Can Help

In rural areas, farmers and other landowners can help in many ways. Ponderosa pine stands, especially stands with plenty of bushes, should be left uncut. Large, dead trees of all types and live black cottonwoods should also be

Present range of the Long-billed Curlew in British Columbia

Former range



preserved. Some areas should be protected from cattle grazing to allow bushes to grow. Lewis's Woodpeckers can also live in more populated areas if suitable nesting trees and snags are left standing. Fruit trees in orchards and shrubs in gardens provide good feeding opportunities. Use of insecticides should be avoided in towns and in the country. Let the woodpeckers eat the insects instead.

More information about these woodpeckers is needed. Sightings of nesting birds can be reported to the Conservation Data Centre in Victoria.

You can find out more about the Wildlife Branch and Conservation Data Centre at:

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/>

Conservation Data Centre
Resources Inventory Branch
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Wildlife Branch
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