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LEWIS' WOODPECKERS IN WESTERN NEBRASKA

On 30 August 1980, Dr. Randy Lawson from Chadron State College reported to me that Lewis' Woodpeckers (*Asyndesmus lewis*) were in a dead elm tree about eight miles south of Chadron on the west side of U.S. Highway 385. We observed them for about an hour, and in the afternoon, Marj Blinde and I watched them for about an hour more. They numbered at least 12 and flew from the elm to fence posts and telephone posts nearby.

They performed the flycatching actions for which they are noted, but it seemed the attraction of this particular location was a chokecherry thicket about 100 yards west of the tree. The tree stood at the edge of another chokecherry thicket, but every time we saw them fly to chokecherries, they went to the farther one.

We sat on a hill close to them and could see them pick the cherries, some of which they swallowed, some they carried back to the dead elm, and in a few instances, we could see them go to fence posts, where they seemed to examine all the cracks and later they went back to the tree with nothing in their beaks.

Examination of the posts disclosed in one post five cherries in cracks that measured just one cherry wide. In two cracks were two cherries, and a single one was in another.

Examination of every post for a distance of about a half mile yielded very few cherries. However, seeds were on tops of many and on the ground by them. One post had a bright green scarab beetle mashed in a crack, possibly put there by a Woodpecker.

An interesting further fact was that many of the seeds on the ground had been opened by something, probably by mice, judging by what appeared to be teeth marks, and the contents were gone.

On 1 September, I spent more time sitting on a hill watching them. A brief shower came up and the Lewis' Woodpeckers in the tree fluttered their wings as though bathing. When the sun came out again, 40 Lewis' Woodpeckers flew by but did not stay in the tree.

The Woodpeckers remained at this location in numbers of five or six into the middle of September and then disappeared. Two people living near this site — one within a half mile and the other about a mile away — commented that they had seen them.

About a month later, I went to every place I thought they might be but saw none.

Other birds in the area at the same time were American Flickers, quite a number of American Kestrels, many American Robins, a small group of Bohemian Waxwings, and one Western Tanager. I saw no interaction between species, but some aggressive behavior between the Woodpeckers. Only once did I hear any kind of vocal sound from the Woodpeckers and that was during an aggressive encounter. It was somewhat like a hissing sound.

A fire burned more than 3,000 acres of mostly ponderosa pine in 1973 between Chadron State Park and the Deadhorse Road about four miles west of the park. The birds are noted for moving into burned-over areas and so they could be expected here. They have been observed in small numbers for several years. Adults were seen feeding young in the last year.

These birds are known for their moving about with little regular pattern. Once before, many years ago, I saw one. It was on a fence post north of Highway 20 between Crawford and Harrison.

— Doris Gates, Rt. 1, Box 25, Chadron, Nebraska 69337