

STATUS OF THE LEWIS' AND RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS IN MANITOBA — 1929-1980

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The Red-bellied Woodpecker, a bird of southeastern North America, and the Lewis' Woodpecker, a bird of southwestern North America, are both irregular visitors to Manitoba. This paper reviews all records of these two species in Manitoba.

Red-bellied Woodpecker

The first record of the Red-bellied Woodpecker was the sighting of a male and a female in Kildonan Park, Winnipeg, on 29 May 1941.³ Mr. Bert Skinner, who made the initial observation, observed both birds "boring a hole in a branch".²⁹ This record was confirmed by A. G. Lawrence and L. T. S. Norris-Elye who also saw the birds in the park.³ Throughout the month of June, both birds were seen regularly, the male more often than the female.³ This led to speculation that the female may have been incubating eggs, but the nest site was never found.³

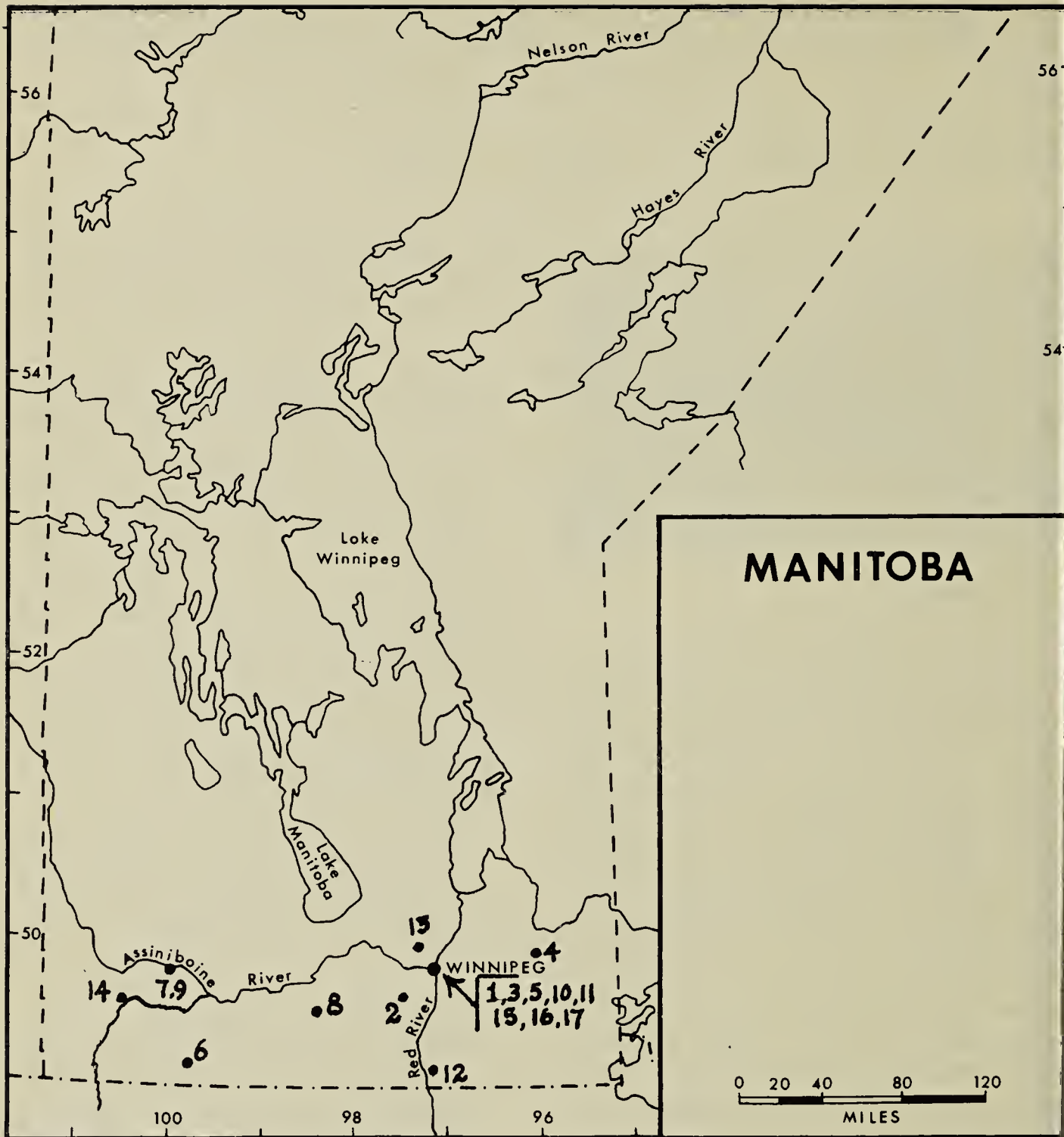
In December of that same year, Mrs. C. A. Moors discovered an immature male at her bird feeder in Sanford, 35 kilometres southwest of Winnipeg (see Map 1).³ When L. T. S. Norris-Elye, A. H. Shortt, R. D. Harris, and B. W. Cartwright visited her on 24 January 1942, they noted that the bird was "just now assuming adult plumage."³

Strong evidence for a provincial breeding record came during the summer of 1942. Several naturalists and two employees of the park's staff, Horace Willis and Hector Macdonald, observed a brood of young in Kildonan Park.³⁶

Lawrence wrote: "we found the 1941 adults quiet about their nesting territory, but the young out of the nest could definitely be labelled as noisy".³⁵ This statement has led to some confusion, however, his report in an earlier column that the 1941 pair was "believed to be nesting, although the cavity chosen eluded all search"³² plus personal communication with persons who saw the 1941 and 1942 birds, indicates that young were only detected in 1942. Undoubtedly the reference to the "1941 adults" should have read 1942.³⁵

This species was not reported again in Winnipeg until 29 June 1952 when V. B. Latta and Orland Gibson observed a female in Kildonan Park "amongst the big trees near their 1941 locale".³⁵ Only the day before, 28 June 1952, these same two birders made the surprising observation of a female Red-bellied Woodpecker with two fledged young at Whitemouth!³⁵

In January 1954, Mr. H. Cross observed a male daily at his feeder in Killarney.³⁶ On 1 January 1956, Dr. Ralph D. Bird photographed a female Red-bellied Woodpecker at the feeder of Mrs. Cliff Chapman, 16 km southeast of Brandon.¹ Harold Mossop observed an immature at Roseisle on 24 November 1956.³⁸ In January 1957, Dr. Ralph D. Bird, Jack Lane, and Walter Richardson observed one at the Indian Industrial School at Brandon.⁴⁰ Then from October 1963 to January 1964, a female was observed regularly at feeding stations in St. Vital and Fort Garry in Winnipeg and on 20 January a



Map 1. SIGHT RECORDS OF THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER IN MANITOBA.

1. Kildonan Park, Winnipeg. May 29 and month of June, 1941. Male and female.
2. Sanford. December 1941 to January 25, 1942. Immature male.
3. Kildonan Park, Winnipeg. Summer, 1942. Brood of young.
4. Whitemouth. June 28, 1952. Female with 2 fledged young.
5. Kildonan Park, Winnipeg. June 29, 1952. Adult female.
6. Killarney. January, 1954. Male.
7. Southeast of Brandon. January 1, 1956. Female.
8. Roseisle. November 24, 1956. One immature.
9. Brandon. January, 1957. One bird.
10. Winnipeg. October 1963 to January 1964. Female.
11. Winnipeg. October 30, 1965. Male.
12. Dominion City. December 20 to 28, 1967. One bird.
13. Stonewall. December 1970 to January 23, 1971. One immature male.
14. Souris. February 24, 1972. Male.
15. Winnipeg. October 16, 1975. One bird.
16. Winnipeg. December 19 to 22, 1975. One bird.
17. Winnipeg. Late October, 1977 to January 9, 1978. Immature male.

male appeared in the same area.⁴ On 30 October 1965, a male was once again seen in Fort Garry.⁴ One was seen at Dominion City by Jim Waddell from 20 to 28 December 1967^{5 39}

A female Red-bellied Woodpecker was observed at Stonewall on 2 January 1971, by Doug. Oakford and again on 16 & 17 January by Ken Gardner, who wrote:

"At about 11:30 a.m. on Jan. 16 it showed up in my yard where it spent about three hours.

During this time it made numerous trips to my feeding station; each time it would take a sunflower seed and fly with it to a nearby tree where the seed would be either eaten or hidden in the bark. The only other food item it tried was piece of raw deer fat attached to the trunk of one of the trees, this it also enjoyed.

The rest of its time was spent foraging on the tree trunks and branches for natural food; of the five species of trees present in our yard it preferred Manitoba Maple, bur oak, and balsam poplar in that order. The eastern white cedars were ignored and the only time it landed on the black spruce was when it was approaching the feeder.

We (my family and I) were able to watch it from our kitchen window at a distance of 50 feet, outside I was within 20 feet of it. The calls of "churr, churr" and "chad" were heard several times and all of its colors and markings were noted quite plainly with the aid of binoculars.

This was definitely a female as the top of the head was ashy grey and not red as in the male. I stated last week that it was a male bird that Doug had seen, however, he informed me that he only thought it was a male as he was not able to get a clear look at the top of its head for positive identification. There is not much doubt that it is the same bird.

She left about 2:30 p.m. and was not seen again until 8:15 the following morning, this time she spent an hour foraging among the trees and visiting the food tray after which she departed and was not seen again during the day."^{4 5}

It was later learned that this woodpecker had been visiting a food tray in the yard of Mr. and Mrs. L. Moore of Stonewall since before Christmas.⁶ They found it dead on their grounds on 23 January.⁶ The bird was believed to have

died one week earlier when strong cold winds were blowing.⁶ The specimen, a male, (No. 1.2-2972) is now in the collection of the Manitoba Museum of Man & Nature (H. W. R. Copland, pers. commun.)

On 24 February 1972 a male was observed in Victoria Park, Souris, by Barbara Robinson. She observed it for 10 minutes through binoculars and heard its loud "chur-chur-chur".⁴¹

On 16 October 1975 one appeared at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clive Roots of Winnipeg.¹⁰ Mr. and Mrs. Roy Low, also of Winnipeg, observed an adult male frequenting their feeding station from 19 to 22 December 1975.¹⁰ Several others, including the senior author were associated with this observation.¹⁰ Both the October and December reports are thought to have involved the same bird.¹⁰

In late October 1977, an immature male appeared at the feeder of Mr. and Mrs. John Doole in St. James, Winnipeg¹² and was seen frequently by the senior author. It was observed subsisting on sunflower seeds through to 9 January 1978.¹² On this date the temperature dropped to -29.4° C and the bird was thought to have succumbed to the cold weather.¹²

According to Godfrey in *The Birds of Canada*, the breeding range of this species includes southeastern Minnesota, extreme southern Ontario, western New York, and Delaware south to southern Texas and southern Florida.⁸ Stewart in the *Breeding Birds of North Dakota* cites one confirmed breeding record (1939) and lists it as an accidental breeding species.⁴⁴

The species has increased its range significantly in Minnesota, now being a "permanent resident from Stearns County south and east" and "regularly encountered" in fall, winter, and spring as far north as Crow Wing County and as far west as the Des Moines River drainage."⁹ Therefore it is reasonable to

expect that it will become of regular occurrence within Manitoba within the next few decades.

Including the initial 1941 sighting, there have been 17 sight records in Manitoba, 3 of which involve more than one bird. There are two probable nesting records (Kildonan Park, 1942 and Whitemouth, 1952). The sightings consisted of three in the 1940s, six in the 1950s, three in the 1960s, and five (four if the 1975 records are combined) in the 1970s. Based on terminology established in 1954 by the Committee from the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, the Red-bellied Woodpecker is regarded as irregular (recorded less than once every year, but no less than once every five years on the average) in occurrence in Manitoba.

Lewis' Woodpecker

Harold Mossop on 24 October 1929, added the Lewis' Woodpecker to the provincial bird list when he discovered one in Winnipeg on a St. Vital golf course adjacent to the Winnipeg Canoe Club (see Map 2). Lawrence, quoting from Mr. Mossop's account of the original 20-minute observation, wrote "He was a big, active fellow and his ac-

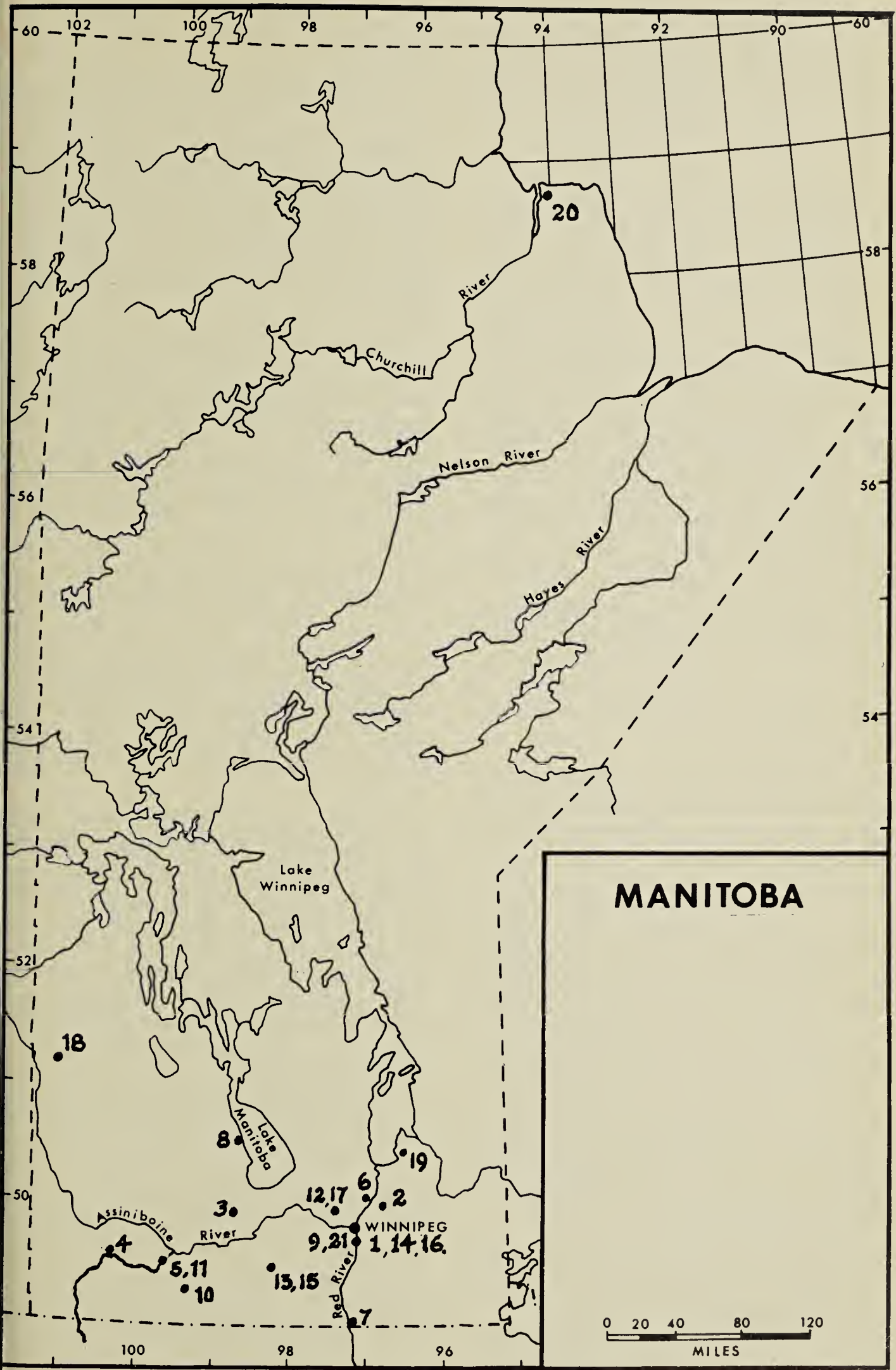
tions were almost identical with those of the Red-headed Woodpecker. He would fly to the ground, then dart high into the air after small moths which were flying about abundantly. Once I noticed him alight crosswise on a perch like an ordinary bird, but I also saw him cling to a poplar in the usual woodpecker fashion. The bird took long flights, one being fully a quarter of a mile long, but always returned to the same place. I also noticed the bird take an acorn and hammer at it, while it was wedged in a crevice in the bark of a tree".¹⁴

An adult which appeared at the Agricultural College in Winnipeg on 17 November was thought to be the same bird.^{2 15} During the rest of November and December 1929, many bird enthusiasts observed this woodpecker at the college roosting in a pole and feeding on suet.¹⁶ Harold Mossop on 19-20 January 1930 once again saw it on the St. Vital golf course where he had originally seen it.¹⁷

William MacHuga saw one at Supton on 18 and 23 February 1930.¹⁸ The third Manitoba record was of one at Bagot on 11 October 1930. The bird was seen by John Wallace and reported to Professor

KEY TO LEWIS' WOODPECKER RECORDS

1. Winnipeg, October 24, 1929 - January 20, 1930. One adult.
2. Supton. February 18 & 23, 1930. One bird.
3. Bagot. October 11, 1930. One bird.
4. Souris. September 27, 1931. One bird.
5. Wawanesa. October 1 and November 10, 1931. One immature.
6. Selkirk. Mid-December, 1931. One adult.
7. Emerson. January, 1932. One adult.
8. Sandy Bay Indian Reservation. October 28, 1935. One adult male.
9. St. Norbert. October 17 and following days, 1937. One bird.
10. Belmont. November 6, 1937. One bird.
11. Souris. Fall, 1938. One adult.
12. Stonewall. November, December 1939 and February 1940. One bird.
13. Carman. October 27 and following days, 1941. One bird.
14. Winnipeg. January 21, 1942. Two observed.
15. Carman. April 24 & 25, 1943. One bird.
16. Winnipeg. May 20 and following days, 1943. One adult.
17. Stonewall. June 13, 1953. Adult.
18. Near Roblin. September 23, 1960. One immature.
19. West of Pine Falls. June 9, 1962. One adult.
20. Churchill. July 4, 7 & 8, 1966. One adult.
21. St. Norbert. November 11 - 27, 1976. First year bird.



MANITOBA

Map 2. SIGHT RECORDS OF THE LEWIS' WOODPECKER IN MANITOBA.

V. W. Jackson with the note that it was "identified from the excellent coloured plate in *Birds of Western Canada*".¹⁹ On 27 September 1931 Mrs. F. A. Hollies observed one at Souris.²⁰

Lawrence wrote "John Walker, Wawanesa, reports that about October 1 he had a splendid view of a Lewis' Woodpecker . . . The bird was again seen on November 10, [1931], the grey collar, rosy breast, black head and back being plainly noted".²¹ The final 1931 report was recorded by Lawrence thus — "Chester Campion, Mapleton School No. 5, West Selkirk, writes that about mid-December a strange woodpecker with dark red around its eyes and bill, rose-red breast, dark upper parts with a grey band around the neck, visited the feeding table which had been erected outside the schoolhouse. Reference to a bird book showed that the stranger was an adult Lewis' Woodpecker, making the third to be reported this fall and winter. L. E. McCall of Selkirk, one of our keenest nature-lovers, confirmed the identification".²²

One spent January 1932 in Emerson and was observed by several people. *Chickadee Notes* carries an excellent account on this bird.²³

The first Manitoba specimen came from Marius, Sandy Bay Indian Reservation, when Father O. Chagnon found one dead on 28 October 1935.²⁴ The specimen (No. 1.2-2760), an adult male, is now in the collection of the Manitoba Museum of Man & Nature.

On 17 October and subsequent days in 1937, C. L. Broley observed one at St. Norbert "busily engaged in storing acorns in crevices of a telephone pole to tide it over the winter".²⁵

John C. Wilson found a Lewis' Woodpecker "in a starved condition" in his barnyard at Belmont on 6 November 1937. The bird died "after refusing to eat suet or other food" and the specimen was "sent to the Manitoba museum in the Auditorium, Winnipeg."²⁶ Unfor-

tunately, the fate of this specimen is a mystery.

In the fall of 1938, Don Ferguson saw an adult storing acorns at Souris.²⁷ Irvine Gardner observed one in Stonewall regularly from early November to the end of December 1939, then for a couple of weeks in February 1940. "The bird lived right in town and although it was very wary, it was positively identified."²⁸

Lawrence wrote "Magistrate R. F. T. Greer, Carman, Man., reports that he observed a Lewis' Woodpecker on October 27, [1941], and has seen it several times since in the same locality, either in or near the grounds of Carman hospital. Dr. F. L. Jamieson also saw the visitor."³⁰

J. H. Kiteley saw two "on January 21, [1942], in River Park, about 300 yards east of the Elm Park bridge" in Winnipeg.³¹ Magistrate Greer again observed one at Carman "in the same heavy oak trees in which the one noted in October 1941 was found."³³ This latter sighting was made on 24 and 25 April 1943.

On 20 May and for some days thereafter in 1943, an adult frequented gardens on Sackville St. in western Winnipeg.³⁴ Lawrence neglected to list the observers, when he wrote up this report.

Ten years passed before the species was again reported in the province. It was discovered by Frank Stanley and a few days later, on 13 June 1953, Ken Gardner and Andrew J. Kolach also saw it sitting atop utility poles and flycatching at Stonewall (Gardner pers. commun.)

On 23 September 1960 Mr. Darrel Crawford of McCreary saw an immature 10 miles south of Roblin on Highway 83. He wrote: "It was flying parallel to the car and as I drew abreast of it, the early morning sun was perfect to highlight the rosy breast and abdomen and whitish collar. It first perched on a fence-post in a peculiar hunched position with its tail spread against the post. It then flitted to

a rosebush, plucked something and flew a few feet to a telephone pole where it appeared to stuff whatever it had into a crevice. It made the trip from the bush to the pole three times."³⁷

On 9 June 1962, D. Harry Young of Winnipeg and three companions saw an adult along Hwy. 12 west of Pine Falls. Shortt wrote: "Unfortunately, it was late in the day when the discovery was made and mosquitoes were thick, so we could not stick it out to determine whether it was nesting thereabouts or not. It acted like it might be, flying from the top of a dead birch tree and back again, still with an insect in its bill, Mr. Young reported.

"There were holes in another birch tree a few yards away. Finally it seemed to put the insect in a crack in the bark, rather than eat it. But we could not wait, the bird was not disposed to move off even though we were close to the trees."⁴³

One at Churchill on 4, 7 and 8 July 1966 was observed by Dr. A. Keast, Dr. J. B. Falls, W. E. Rees, and John Lamey.¹³ As indicated by Map 2 this is the only record for northern Manitoba.

The most recent provincial record was of one present on St. Pierre Street in St. Norbert from 11 to 27 November 1976. This first-year bird was discovered by Casimir C. Lindsay, whose yard it frequented.^{7 11} It was seen by numerous birders. On the three days that the senior author observed it, much of its time was spent storing bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) acorns and being highly aggressive in its pursuit of Red Squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) and Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*). Once I saw it retrieve and eat at least two acorns hidden in a small rotted cavity of a Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*).

Godfrey states that the breeding range of this species extends from southern B.C., southwestern Alberta Montana, and southwestern South Dakota south to California, Arizona, and

New Mexico.⁸ According to Salt and Salt in *The Birds of Alberta*, this species' easterly extralimital wanderings usually occur during September and October during the fall and during the month of May in spring.⁴²

Including the initial 1929 sighting, there have been 21 sight records of the Lewis' Woodpecker in Manitoba, of which only one observation involved more than one bird (brace in Winnipeg, 1942).

In the 15 years, 1929 to 1943 inclusive, this species was recorded in the province every year except for three (1933, 1934, and 1936). In the following 37 years, 1944 to 1980 inclusive, the Lewis' Woodpecker has been recorded only in five years and must be classed of irregular occurrence in Manitoba.

We wish to thank Herbert W. R. Copland, J. B. Gollop and Rudolf F. Koes for supplying us with additional information.

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