

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

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During the summer of 1982 two pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers nested in the immediate area of our cottage at Whytefold on Lake Winnipeg. On 25 May I heard repeated calls of churr-churr and then noticed two of these birds flying back and forth across the busy road which runs in front of our cottage. They appeared to be chiselling wood-boring insects from tree trunks.

As this procedure continued for many days, I determined to locate the nest site. I had previously noted a broken-off poplar on a wooded lot in front of a cottage approximately 150 m. down the road. There were at least seven holes in the partly dead tree.¹ After returning several times, on 13 June my efforts were rewarded. As I stood with my binoculars focused on the cavities an adult bird flew into one of them, freshly excavated, approximately 2.4 m. from the ground. I presumed at that time that incubation was taking place. Since the sexes are similar, I was not able to determine if both male and female took part in incubating the clutch, but Bent says that "both sexes assist in this duty, as well as in the care of the young . . . incubation is said to last for about 14 days."²

I visited the site on several more occasions, but it was not until 5 July that I saw an adult enter the hole with a beakful of fishflies. On 18 July I saw two nearly-fledged young close to the cavity entrance, and the next day I watched an adult feed fishflies to one of them.

After I had been observing this nest for several days I became aware of the fact that there must be another pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers in the area; every once in awhile I noticed an adult fly criss-cross through the wooded lot at

the south side of our property. It appeared to be heading, I thought, for a particular secluded spot not too far away. On 26 June about 60 m. across a narrow roadway from the first-discovered nest site, I noticed two adult birds drilling for grubs on top of a telephone pole and then flying into a private wooded area. I discovered that they were taking food to a cavity, approximately 3 m. from the ground, in a partly dead broken-off poplar. An adult flew across the roadway 29 June returning to the nest cavity with a beakful of insects. The other adult sat atop the telephone pole, preening its feathers, sunning, and then drilling for grubs.

I presumed, at that time, that the nestlings were quite young because every time an adult brought food to the cavity its entire body disappeared into the hole. Literature cites a depth of 20.3 cm to 61 cm for a nest cavity.³ By 5 and 6 July an adult bringing insects poked only its beak into the hole; 2 days later I noticed one young head protruding. Two fledged young were seen climbing up the dead tree above the nest hole 17 July.

On this occasion I was very surprised to notice one of the adults was commencing to drill a new hole in the same tree 0.6 m. higher up. As work on this second cavity began before the first nesting had been completed, could it be that the birds intended to have a second family? As the bird drilled, it was fascinating to watch the sawdust flying. I have read that Nature has provided woodpeckers' noses with a lining of tiny hairs to keep them from breathing the sawdust as they drill.

On 19 July I observed one fledgling on the same tree and an adult was still

working on the new hole; its whole body now disappeared into it. It was amazing to see how smooth and round was the 5 cm doorway.

In neither of the nests was I able to determine the size of the clutch nor the exact number of young. Literature cites a clutch of 4 to 7 and that "as an egg is laid each day and, as incubation often begins before the set is complete, the young may hatch on different days."²

I was surprised 21 July to notice a fledged young trying to get out of the new hole which the adult bird(s) had made. It kept giving calls, slid back in, and then pulled itself half way out; it almost appeared to be stuck!

After the young had fledged, on numerous occasions until the first week in September, I heard the churr-churr calls from the birds of these two families, and saw adults and brown-headed fledglings flying in and out of the treed areas nearby. They also made a practice of flying back and forth across the road. It is a well-known fact that this species suffers great losses because of this habit.

Red-headed Woodpeckers appear to be increasing all along the beach area on Lake Winnipeg. During the summer of 1982, eight were seen at one time on the golf course at Winnipeg Beach. While they are a fascinating bird they can, however, cause problems. A permanent resident, who lives approximately 8 km north of Winnipeg Beach, became quite disillusioned with a pair of these birds in June. They took over the feeder completely; in fact, they took over the entire yard. Northern Orioles, in particular, were attacked continuously and thus were prevented from building nests. (In 1981 three pairs of these birds had nested.) Finally, the resident ceased to put any more sunflower seeds on the feeder and the Red-headed Woodpeckers flew off to an adjoining wooded property.

Red-headed Woodpeckers are fascinating birds. The brilliant red head and the large white wing patch stand out in flight, thus attracting a great deal of attention. There can be no greater pleasure than to observe this very interesting species.

¹ BANCROFT, JEAN. 1982. Trees for Cavity-Dwellers. *Blue Jay* 40 (3):166-167.

² BENT, ARTHUR C. 1964. Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers. New York, Dover Press.

³ HARRISON, HAL. H. 1975. A Field Guide to Birds' Nests in the United States east of the Mississippi River. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

INFORMATION WANTED — BIRDS OF THE SWIFT CURRENT AREA

I am seeking sight records for birds of the Swift Current area. Information concerning numbers, early and late dates and nesting records, with the location and observer's name are of interest.

The study area for my proposed bird list consists of a 50 km circle centered on Swift Current. This includes Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park on the north, Reed Lake at Morse to the east, and extends west almost as far as Gull Lake and south 15 km beyond Cadillac.

All such records should be sent to: *Christopher Harris*, c/o Prairie Wildlife Interpretation Centre, Box 10, Webb, Saskatchewan. S0N 2X0