

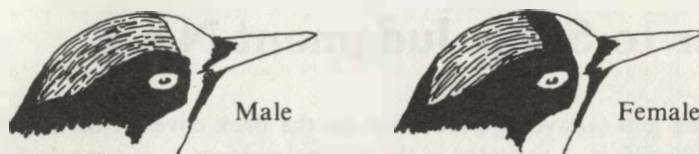
In Detail

Acorn Woodpecker

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It is surprising that none of the standard field guides covering western birds (Pough 1957; Peterson 1961; Robbins *et al.* 1966) describes the plumage differences between males and females of the Acorn Woodpecker *Melanerpes formicivorus*. Actually, the sexes of adults of this common and conspicuous woodpecker may be distinguished easily by their head-patterns, as indicated in Figure 1. Males have white foreheads and red crowns; in females, the white and red areas are separated by a black band crossing the fore part of the crown.

FIGURE 1: Head-patterns of adult Acorn Woodpeckers



There has been some confusion over the juvenal plumage of the Acorn Woodpecker, but the situation was clarified recently by Spray and MacRoberts (1975). Juveniles of both sexes, they reported, have the head pattern of the adult male, with white meeting red on the forecrown. This is thus one of the very few bird species in which the young resemble the adult male more closely than the adult female.

In summer, then, until the time of the postjuvenal molt (early fall in our area), some caution must be applied in distinguishing juveniles (both sexes) from adult males. Of the several distinctions mentioned by Spray and MacRoberts (*op. cit.*), the one I have found easiest to use in the field is the pattern of the underparts. Adults have glossy black chest-bands and vertical black streaks on the lower breast (may be slightly brownish if the plumage is very worn), and the ground color of the lower breast and belly is quite white. In juveniles the chest-band and breast-streaks are brown, and the ground color of the lower breast and belly is pale tan. Juveniles are also brownish on the neck, scapulars, and back, but this character is tricky since these areas may become brownish on adults when the plumage is very worn. Eye color is worth noting, since adults almost always show conspicuous white irides while those of the juveniles are dark at first, gradually paling to white by mid-autumn.

LITERATURE CITED

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 SPRAY, C.J., AND M.H. MACROBERTS. 1975. Notes on molt and juvenal plumage in the Acorn Woodpecker. *Condor* 77: 342-344.