

Red-bellied Woodpecker Nesting in Rainy River District

Glenn Coady

Figure 1. Male Red-bellied Woodpecker
at the Rainy River nest on 12 July 2005.

Photo: Larry and Linda Budreau.

Introduction

The Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) is a permanent resident of open deciduous woodlands, riparian forests, swamps, parklands, agricultural lands and suburbs of southeastern North America (Shackleton *et al.* 2000).

It is resident from south-central North Dakota, eastern South Dakota,

central Minnesota, central Wisconsin, central Michigan, southern Ontario, central New York and Massachusetts south to central Texas, the Gulf Coast and southernmost Florida, and west to Iowa, central Nebraska, northeastern Colorado, western Kansas, western Oklahoma, and north-central Texas. (AOU 1998).

Casual records have occurred north to Idaho, southern Saskatchewan, northeastern Montana, southeastern Wyoming, southern Manitoba, northern Ontario, southern Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, and west to southeastern Colorado and eastern New Mexico (AOU 1998).

In Ontario, James (1991) listed it as a rare to locally uncommon permanent resident in the extreme south (north to Huron County, Durham Regional Municipality and Prince Edward County) and a vagrant in the north to western Rainy River District in summer.

This paper provides details of the first documented nest record of the Red-bellied Woodpecker in northern Ontario.

Observations

The Red-bellied Woodpecker is a rare bird in northern Ontario, with 17 records accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) up to 2006 (Crins 2007).

The first record for Rainy River District involved a male found at Harris Hill by Robert Tymstra on 15 June 1989 (Wormington and Curry 1990). The second record involved a male found at the Rainy River mouth by Chris Martin and Gordon Martin from 24 May to 1 June 2003 (Crins 2004). A third record involved a male found by Colin Young that remained in Atikokan from mid-November 2003 to June 2004 (Crins 2004). The fourth record

pertained to a male found at Devlin from 8-18 May 2004 by Arlene Rae (Crins 2005).

The fifth record for Rainy River District also involved a male bird. It was found in December 2004, coming to the feeders of Julia and Roland Hill, at their home just south of the Oak Grove Camp near the Rainy River mouth. This bird was also observed repeatedly gleaning fat from a deer skin that was hung out to dry on their property (pers. comm. Roland Hill). This male bird continued visiting their feeders into the spring of 2005, when it was regularly heard drumming near their property. In May 2005, this male Red-bellied Woodpecker was joined at their feeders by a female (photographs of both birds were obtained by Julia Hill), and both birds continued to visit the feeders at both the Hill's home and the Oak Grove Camp home of Larry and Linda Budreau throughout the summer.

On 8 July 2005, while doing field work on behalf of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, the author discovered the nest of this pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers (Ontario Nest Record Scheme # 180838), in a dead snag near the top of a Paper Birch (*Betula papyrifera*), on the east side of the cottage road that runs south from the Oak Grove Camp, near the mouth of the Rainy River (nest location: 15U 375629 5408537 NAD83; 48° 49' 2.5" N, 94° 41' 39.26" W). The nest hole was approximately seven metres above the ground and faced west (Figure 1).

In four hours of observation 8-9 July 2005, both the male and female Red-bellied Woodpeckers were observed by the author delivering a wide assortment of food items (suet, berries, acorns, caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles, wasps, and one unidentified bird egg) to a minimum of three large young at the nest hole (Figures 2 and 3). This nest was videotaped by the author and still photographs were obtained by Larry and Linda Budreau (Figures 1-3). Julia Hill later observed the successfully fledged young visiting her feeders with the adults.

Linda Budreau reported a male still present at the Oak Grove Camp on 30 May 2006 (Crins 2007). Throughout the summer of 2007, male Red-bellied Woodpeckers were present at both the Oak Grove Camp (pers. comm. Linda Budreau) and the Harris Hill Resort (pers. comm. Cheryl Gauthier). The Red-bellied Woodpecker has been removed from the OBRC Review List for northern Ontario, effective 1 January 2007 (Crins 2007).

Discussion

The closest area to western Rainy River District where the Red-bellied Woodpecker is a known regular breeding species is well to the south (approximately 240 km) in central Minnesota (Janssen 1987).



Figure 2. Male Red-bellied Woodpecker exiting the nest hole on 12 July 2005.

Photo: Larry and Linda Budreau.

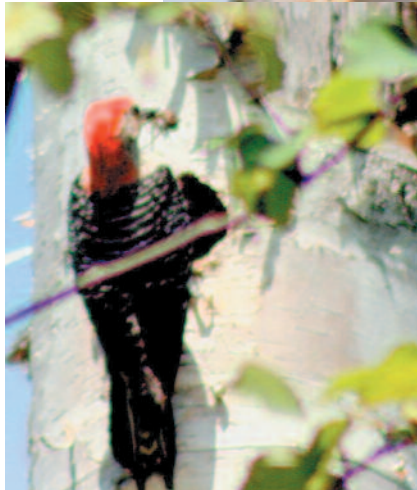


Figure 3: Male Red-bellied Woodpecker delivering food to young at the nest on 12 July 2005.

Photo: Larry and Linda Budreau.

In Manitoba, although the Red-bellied Woodpecker is not considered a confirmed breeding bird, there have been several interesting anecdotal records. A pair of birds was found by Mrs. Bert Skinner on 29 May 1941 in Winnipeg's Kildonan Park and remained throughout June. Although breeding was suspected, it was never confirmed. The following year it was claimed that a brood of young were observed at that site, but no nest was located (Hatch and L'Arrivée 1981). On 28 June 1952, a female and two fledged young were reported by Victor Latta and Orland Gibson at Whitemouth, but local breeding was never confirmed (Hatch and L'Arrivée 1981). More recent records in Manitoba have included a drumming

bird in Shilo on 11 June 1991, and a probable family party near Crystal City in the summer of 2001 (Manitoba Avian Research Committee 2003).

The nest of Red-bellied Woodpeckers found near the Rainy River mouth on 8 July 2005 represents the first nest of this species for northern Ontario (Peck and Peck 2006) and the northernmost confirmed nest record for North America.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Larry and Linda Budreau for allowing me to publish their photographs of this Red-bellied Woodpecker nest. I would also like to thank Roland and Julia Hill and Dan Lee for providing information on sightings of this pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers that helped in locating the nest.



EAGLE OPTICS.CA™














Binoculars
Spotting Scopes
Tripods
Accessories

ONLINE OR IN-STORE
...YOUR SOURCE FOR OPTICS!

951 Gordon St, Unit 3, Guelph ON N1G 4S1
www.eagleoptics.ca



Eagle Optics brand products are also available at participating Wild Birds Unlimited stores. Visit www.wbu.com to find a location near you!

References

- American Ornithologists' Union.** 1998. Check-list of the North American birds. 7th Edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Crins, W.J.** 2004. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2003. Ontario Birds 22:54-74.
- Crins, W.J.** 2005. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2004. Ontario Birds 23:54-75.
- Crins, W.J.** 2006. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2005. Ontario Birds 24:54-74.
- Crins, W.J.** 2007. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2006. Ontario Birds 25:50-68.
- Hatch, D.R.M. and L.P. L'Arrivée.** 1981. Status of Lewis' and Red-bellied Woodpeckers in Manitoba 1929-1980. Blue Jay 39:209-216.
- James, R.D.** 1991. Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario. Life Sciences Miscellaneous Publications, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.
- Janssen, R.B.** 1987. Birds in Minnesota. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Manitoba Avian Research Committee.** 2003. The Birds of Manitoba. Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg.
- Peck, G.K. and M.K. Peck.** 2006. Ontario Nest Records Scheme – ONRS 37 – Thirty-seventh Report (1956-2005). Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.
- Shackleton, C.E., R.E. Brown and R.N. Conner.** 2000. Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*). The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca. <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/500>
- Wormington, A. and R.H. Curry.** 1990. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1989. Ontario Birds 8:4-33.

Glenn Coady, 604 – 60 Mountview Avenue,
Toronto, Ontario M6P 2L4