

ANOTHER HYBRID DOWNY x NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER FROM SAN DIEGO COUNTY

PHILIP UNITT, 3411 Felton Street, San Diego, California 92104

Short (1971) reported three hybrid Downy [*Picoides* (= *Dendrocopos*) *pubescens*] x Nuttall's (*P. nuttallii*) Woodpeckers, one collected at "San Francisco," California, in the 19th century and two along the San Diego River near Lakeside and Santee, San Diego County, California, in September and October 1949. He suggested that the two species are close relatives that hybridize where they are sympatric but one species' population is sparse enough that individuals have difficulty finding conspecific mates. Such conditions prevail in the riparian woodlands of coastal San Diego County, where the Nuttall's Woodpecker is common and widespread, but the Downy Woodpecker is uncommon and localized (Short 1971, Unitt 1984).

On 7 May 1984, along the San Luis Rey River 3.7 km (2.3 miles) northeast of Bonsall, San Diego County, I heard a peculiar woodpecker call, a chatter on a single pitch that seemed intermediate between the ascending rattle of the Nuttall's and the descending whinny of the Downy. I located the bird visually and saw that at a distance the bird looked much like a Nuttall's Woodpecker, but that the black and white bars on its back seemed slightly irregular. Suspecting the possibility of a hybrid, I collected the bird and prepared it as a study skin. I had observed both parental species at this locality previously: two *pubescens* on 28 February 1984 and one on 16 July 1978; two *nuttallii* on 16 July 1978. The specimen was a male in breeding condition with the testes greatly enlarged (5.5 x 11 mm each). It weighed 33.5 grams and was moderately fat. As to be expected at this time of year, it was in badly worn plumage and was not molting. The specimen, my original number 366, is now number 43956 in the San Diego Natural History Museum.

Most differences in plumage and structure between Nuttall's and Downy woodpeckers were tabulated by Short (1971). The most conspicuous difference is the back pattern: regular black and white transverse bars in Nuttall's, black with a single longitudinal broad white stripe in the Downy. Male Nuttall's Woodpeckers have fine white streaks on their black crowns, though the extent of this streaking is quite variable, from profuse to slight. Male Downy Woodpeckers have solidly black crowns. The red nuchal band is broader in Nuttall's (about 13 to 15 mm, measured longitudinally and mid-dorsally) than in the Downy (about 6.5 to 9.5 mm). In Nuttall's Woodpecker a black bar on the side of the head joins the black auricular patch to the black malar stripe; this bar is absent in Downy. The background color of the underparts is essentially white in Nuttall's but is strongly tinted smoke gray in the coastal California subspecies of Downy (*P.p. turati*). The sides of Nuttall's Woodpeckers are heavily spotted with black, and these spots become bars on the flanks. The underparts of adult Downies are unmarked except for one or two small black spots on the sides of the breasts of a few individuals. *Picoides nuttallii* is larger than *P.p. turati*, with males' wing chords 99.7–107 mm and exposed culmens 19.5–22 mm, as opposed to 88.5–97 mm and 15–17 mm, respectively (Ridgway 1914, Short 1971).

The specimen collected on 7 May 1984 is intermediate between Nuttall's and Downy woodpeckers, being closer to the first species in some characters, to the second in others. It is closer to Nuttall's Woodpecker in back pattern, though the barring is coarser than in that species, is somewhat irregular in the center of the back, and does not extend to the anterior scapulars. The head pattern is much like that of Downy: the crown is plain black, and the red nuchal band is 9.5 mm wide, equal to the widest in any *P.p. turati* I measured. The black malar stripe barely touches the black auricular patch. The underparts are the most difficult to evaluate since the feathers are so badly worn and likely faded. The background color seems almost pure white, but there are

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only two small black dots on the sides of the upper breast, and the lower flanks are only faintly barred gray. Thus the underparts combine features of both species. The specimen's wing chord measures 97.2 mm and its exposed culmen, 19.0 mm; so the bird is intermediate in both structures. Therefore I conclude that it is a hybrid. Short regarded the previous hybrids as F_1 individuals, and came to no conclusion regarding the possibility of hybrids backcrossing with the parental species. My specimen's being so clearly in breeding condition suggests that such backcrossing may occur. The new specimen may not necessarily have been of the F_1 generation itself.

In the field the bird gave the gross impression of being a Nuttall's Woodpecker. I may not have suspected its hybrid nature had I not heard its odd call. Hybrids between Downy and Nuttall's woodpeckers, though probably rare, may often go unnoticed. Since the genes producing the barred back apparently are dominant over those producing the white back (Short 1971), observers should not rely exclusively on back pattern to distinguish Downy from Nuttall's Woodpeckers or their hybrids.

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