

Acorn Woodpecker

Melanerpes formicivorus

Reminiscent of a troupe of wide-eyed clowns, Acorn Woodpeckers live in large groups in western oak woodlands. Their social lives are endlessly fascinating: they store thousands of acorns each year by jamming them into specially made holes in trees. A group member is always on alert to guard the hoard from thieves, while others race through the trees giving parrotlike waka-waka calls. Their breeding behavior is equally complicated, with multiple males and females combining efforts to raise young in a single nest.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Acorn Woodpeckers are medium-sized woodpeckers with straight, spike-like bills and stiff, wedge-shaped tails used for support as the birds cling to tree trunks.

Color Pattern

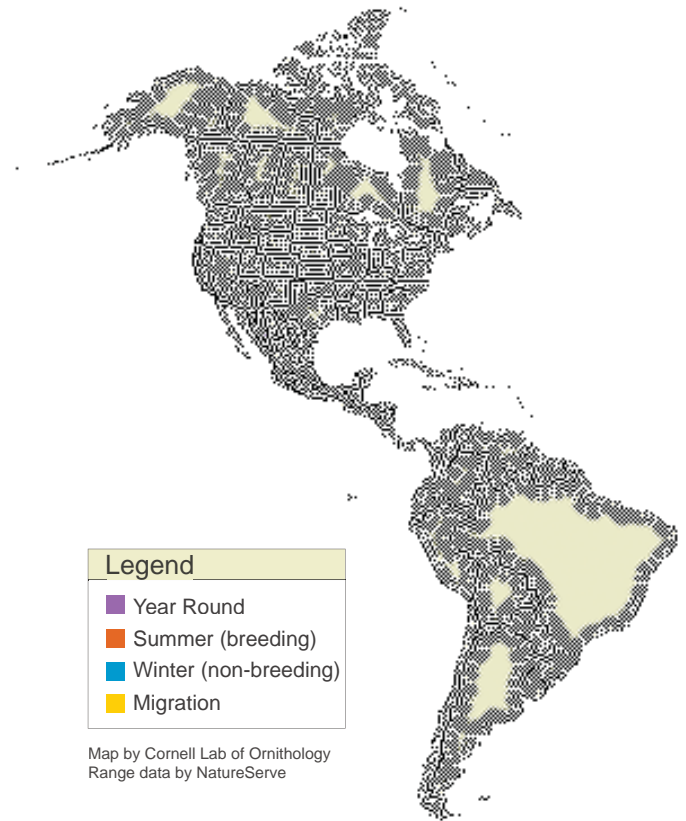
These striking birds are mostly black above with a red cap, creamy white face, and black patch around the bill. In flight, they show three patches of white: one in each wing and one on the rump. Females have less red on the crown than males.

Behavior

Acorn Woodpeckers are very unusual woodpeckers that live in large groups, hoard acorns, and breed cooperatively. Group members gather acorns by the hundreds and wedge them into holes they've made in a tree trunk or telephone pole. Acorn Woodpeckers also spend considerable time catching insects on the wing. They give raucous, scratchy waka-waka calls frequently.

Habitat

These woodpeckers live in oak and mixed oak-conifer forests on slopes and mountains in the Southwest and West Coast. They're tolerant of humans, and you can find them in towns where there are acorns and suitable places to store them.



Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 7.5 - 9.1 inches
- Wingspan - 13.8 - 16.9 inches
- Weight - 2.3 - 3.2 ounces