

A Red-Headed Woodpecker Seen in Idaho

By Edson Fichter

Red-headed Woodpecker Seen in Idaho.— On June 24, 1957, at 1:38 P. M., my family and I were surprised to see a Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) in Craters of the Moon National Monument, 26 miles southwest of Arco, Butte County, Idaho. We were driving slowly about three-fourths of a mile east of that part of the Monument known as "Devil's Orchard" when the bird flew across the road, 10 to 15 feet above the ground and perhaps 20 yards in front of the car. It immediately alighted in a limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*) at about 30 yards and we were able to watch it through 8x field glasses for a minute or so before it again flew.

The breeding range of this species (i.e., of the western subspecies, *M. e. caurinus*) reaches its western limits "from southern Saskatchewan . . . south through central Montana, eastern Wyoming, and eastern Colorado to northern New Mexico and northwestern Texas," with occurrences "casual in Alberta, Utah, and Arizona" (American Ornithologists' Union, 1957: 318).

To my knowledge, there is no specimen of the Red-headed Woodpecker on record for Idaho. However, having known the species well in the Middle West where I lived for nearly 40 years, and in view of the fact that the bird is virtually unmistakable in the field, I have no reluctance in reporting this extralimital occurrence.

Eighty-six years ago Coues (1874:290) considered the westernmost records of occurrence of this woodpecker "upon which full reliance" could be placed as being "those from the headwaters of the Missouri and its tributaries, and from Salt Lake City." More recent occurrences apparently west of the breeding range have been reported as follows: Near Steamboat Springs, Routt County, northwestern Colorado in 1907 (Warren, 1908:21); on the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Box Elder County, northern Utah in 1941 (Williams, 1942:578); near Bozeman, Gallatin County, southwestern Montana, date not reported (Saunders, 1911:38); at Choteau and Strabane, Teton County, northwestern Montana in 1911 and 1912 (Saunders, 1914:133), and near Fortine, Lincoln County, roughly 150 miles further northwest in Montana in 1931 (Weydemeyer, 1932:139).

In Wyoming, the Red-headed Woodpecker has been reported from as far west as Yellowstone National Park (Skinner, 1925:173).

Craters of the Moon National Monument is approximately 45 miles south and 120 miles west of the southwest corner of Yellowstone Park.

The occurrence reported here is probably best considered casual or accidental, inasmuch as these designations seem to be firmly fixed in the literature. However, it might be helpful to recall the suggestion that extralimital wanderings by individual birds are not accidental; rather, they are to be expected as "part of the evolutionary program," contributing to the spread of species (Grinnell, 1922).

That the Red-headed Woodpecker was extending its range westward in eastern Colorado some 20 years ago was noted by Niedrach and Rockwell (1939:103). In this connection, our sighting may gain some interest because of an earlier, albeit poorly supported indication of the species' presence in the Craters of the Moon National Monument. Thirty-two years ago Stearns (1928:26) listed 24 birds "known to inhabit" the site, and included the Red-headed Woodpecker as "reported."

The Monument, with an area of approximately 39 square miles, exhibits a variety of the phenomena associated with mild volcanic action, such as cinder cones, spatter cones, vents, lava flows, lava tubes, tree molds, etc. Interior lavas have issued along a 75-mile-long rift during at least three eruptive periods, the latest of which is believed to have ended within the last 500 years. (Craters of the Moon folder, U. S. Government Printing Office: 1947 O-F-761251).

Four species of trees occur in the area—limber pine, quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and Rocky Mountain red juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), all somewhat dwarfed, with chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana* var. *melanocarpa*) reaching tree size in some situations. Eight species of shrubs characterize the lower woody vegetation (McElreath, in Stearns, *op. cit.*:28-29).

The limber pine grows in open stands and presents the most obvious of several striking vegetational features in this harsh land of dark brown cinder slopes and jagged lava beds where the rainfall averages about ten inches per year. It was within one of the limber pine stands that we saw the Red-headed Woodpecker.

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