



Ventana Wildlife Society

Nuttall's Woodpecker *Picoides nuttallii*

sycamore trees. Away from the ground and predators, a parasite-free nest cavity can offer good protection for up to six small, white, elliptical eggs. Provided everything goes well, after about two weeks of their mother and father incubating by day and just the father by night, new nestlings will emerge.

Immediately following the hatching of their nestlings, mother and father Nuttall's increase the voracity of their foraging. They especially prefer foraging around oaks and in riparian areas where they look for their main source of food: beetles and their larva. Nuttall's woodpeckers also eat lesser quantities of other insects, berries, and nuts. With a nutritious, high-protein diet, the nestlings grow extremely rapidly. In approximately four weeks they are ready to fledge.

Soon after fledging, the nesting cavity is abandoned, and in time can function as a nest site or home for other animals. The fledglings continue to be cared for by their parents for several weeks, in which time they learn and perfect the methods needed for survival into adulthood and ultimately the way in which to continue the sequence of passing on genes. Through this cycle, the rhythm of the Nuttall's woodpeckers lives, and year after year the beat goes on.

Who Am I?

by James Link

Spring is here and like clockwork, the Nuttall's woodpeckers have begun their yearly breeding rituals. Once again the sounds of courtship drumming and home building can be heard throughout the oak-woodland and chaparral regions of California where this small woodpecker literally carves its existence from the trees.

Every year between late April and early July, Nuttall's work hard to raise their young. They begin by attracting a mate by courtship drumming. Unlike passerines whose males do the spring singing, both male and female Nuttall's woodpeckers drum. Their seasonal drumming is very similar to the springtime melodies of songbirds in that it serves as a long-distance method of communication to declare territory and attract a mate.

Because mating pairs stay closely bonded year-round and remain mates for life, finding a mate is usually a once-in-a-lifetime event. Unfortunately, the hard work of homebuilding for their young is not. In order to avoid parasitism and predation, a new nesting cavity is excavated each year. While the female is not totally absent of construction duties, it is the male that does most of the work.

Nest cavities built by Nuttall's are carved between three and sixty feet above the ground in the dead wood of willow, cottonwood, or



Nuttall's Woodpecker
Tom Grey

