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ACCEPT 7-0

CFO-ORC-FILE# _____

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS SIGHT RECORD FORM

Species: Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

Date: 11 April 1999

Number of birds seen: 6

Sex: 2 male, 1 female, 3 undetermined

Plumage: Adult (after hatch year)

Locality: North end of Meadow Rd. Access as follows: From Durango proceed west on Hwy 160 to Wildcat Canyon (Rd. 141). Turn right (north) on Meadow Rd. through a sparsely developed area to a dead end. Two granary trees are on the right side adjacent to a residence. Telephone poles run along this dirt road and appear to be used heavily by the woodpeckers.

Elevation: 6750'

Nearest town: Durango

County: La Plata

Time observed: 1100-1115 hrs

Duration of observation: 20 min.

Other observers with you: Lisa Marchet

Other observers who saw the birds independently: None that I am aware of this year. Sightings of Acorn woodpeckers were given to me by others in 1998 and location description was given to me this year by T. Leukering.

Light conditions: Clear skies, 10% cloud cover

Optical equipment: Leica 10X42

Distance from bird: 20 meters

Description of the bird's behavior: Birds were active, vocal and gregarious. Up to three individuals were seen on one telephone pole at the same time. The birds observed behaved very much as a family group with interactions between individuals including pursuit while ascending the telephone pole and general group movements. For example, we observed the birds for several minutes upon first arriving on the telephone pole. One individual flew off and another took its place, flying in from the direction of the granary trees. The birds that remained became very vocal and began working up towards the top of the pole keeping a short distance from each other. It was at this time that I was able to sex the three individuals present. I could also hear the bird that left calling from the Gambel oak to the north within 30 meters. Several minutes later, the group on the telephone pole flew off one at a time towards the bird in the Gambel oak and towards the Ponderosa pine trees further up the slope to the north. As this was taking place, two more individuals flew from the direction of the granary trees to follow the group up towards the pines. These last two birds appeared to associate loosely with the others and were less vocal.

Description of the bird: As we approached the end of the road near the granary trees, I immediately noticed woodpeckers on the telephone pole actively moving in and out of view. I stopped the vehicle within 25 meters and looked with binoculars, using the car as a blind. I observed the black back and distinctive face pattern of these birds and could hear them calling from the open window. Lisa and I both observed the whitish-yellow throat extending to the white checks and black face (auriculars) offset dramatically by a pale eye. We discussed this among ourselves and I then began to look at the crown of the birds to identify between male and female. I proceeded to explain to Lisa the differences between sexes

and we both observed one individual with an entirely red crown and two others with a black crown with red occurring only on the hindcrown. As the birds flew from the telephone pole we got out of car to watch their movements. Other birds joined in the general flight movement towards the slope to the north, and at this time we were able to see the black back with contrasting white rump and white patch on the wings (inner primaries).

Description of the bird's song and call: Several birds gave repeated *whack-ah* calls while on the telephone pole and from the Ponderosa pines after they had flown out of site. At times I could hear more than one bird calling simultaneously.

Description of the habitat in which the bird was observed: I would characterize the habitat as an open Ponderosa pine forest with a Gambel oak understory. Many of the trees were mature and there were two visible Ponderosa pine snags that were very large and possibly being used as granary trees by these woodpeckers. I did not see any birds on either of these trees but only flying from the general vicinity. These two dead trees had medium to large sized holes which are typically excavated by Acorn woodpeckers to store acorns.

Elimination of similarly appearing species: *Picoides* woodpeckers were eliminated by a combination of many characteristics which include the lack of the "clownish" face pattern, entirely black back, white rump, pale eye and different behavior and call. Three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*) may resemble Acorn woodpeckers at first glance because of the lack of the solid white back stripe of Hairy and Downy woodpeckers, but neither sex of this species has any red in the crown and also lacks the above mentioned characteristics. The Three-toed woodpecker is also generally found at higher elevations in Colorado and probably rarely or never forms loose groups of six or more individuals.

Prior experience with this and similarly appearing species: During the summer, 1997, I spent considerable time conducting bird censuses in the oak woodlands of central California. The Acorn woodpecker was among the most common birds observed and I was able to gain experience through observation of the unique social organization and behavior of family groups within this species. It will be interesting to observe this group of woodpeckers here in Colorado and determine information such as the size of the family group from year to year, dispersal to new areas and nesting success. The number of birds this year may indicate successful breeding last year (1998). Studies in CA by Koenig and Mumme have shown that 95% of young Acorn woodpeckers remain in their natal group up to their first spring and that offspring from the previous years are very likely to remain in their family unit as "helpers" rather than dispersing (Population Ecology of the Cooperatively Breeding Acorn Woodpecker, 1987).

List books if they helped in your identification: National Geographic's *Birds of North America* was reviewed to aid in sexing individuals.

This report was written from notes taken during/ after observation/ from memory: This report was written on 13 May partially from notes taken after observations at the location of the sightings on 11 April and partially from memory.

Reporting observer: Peter Gaede

Signature: Peter Gaede

Address: 18 E. St. Vrain, Col. Springs, CO 80903 (719) 641-2944