



## Acorn Woodpecker

### Coloring Instructions:

Red - the crown

Yellow - the eye

White - the forehead, throat, belly, rump, thighs, wing patch

Black - the bill, the patch around the bill, legs, feet, ear patch, nape, breast, back, tail and wings (except for the white wing patches)

# Acorn Woodpecker

**Length:** 8"

**Habitat:** Common resident of oak woodlands

**Field marks:** Medium-sized black bird with bright red crown, white throat and forehead. In flight: white rump and white patches on upper wing

Acorn Woodpeckers prefer to eat flying insects during the warm months, but they eat acorns, green or ripe, from any species of oak tree year-round. The ones that live in areas with several types of oak trees tend to have greater success over the years because they are less dependent on the acorns from any one species of oak tree. The Valley Oaks might have a good acorn crop when the Blue Oaks don't.

Acorn Woodpeckers make their lives more predictable by saving acorns using **granary trees**. These trees are studded with acorns that the woodpeckers have hammered tip first into holes pecked into the wood. Some granary trees have been found with 50,000 acorns. These trees ensure a reliable supply of acorns. Such an abundant supply, however, attracts squirrels and other birds. So, the Acorn Woodpeckers must defend their granaries. They attack those trying to steal their acorns.

Remember how Western Scrub Jays store acorns underground, thereby planting millions of acorns each year and benefiting the oaks? Acorns stored in granary trees can't successfully sprout and so don't benefit the oaks.

Creating and maintaining a granary tree requires lots of work throughout the year, more than a pair of Acorn Woodpeckers can do. Acorn Woodpeckers in California solve this problem by nesting communally. The communes can be as large as 15 individuals. A commune consists of one (sometimes two) breeding pairs plus their children from previous years plus other relatives. The commune establishes and maintains a territory that includes two or more granary trees. All the birds store acorns and defend the territory.

When nesting time comes, all the eggs are laid in one nest. If two females are laying eggs in the same nest, they might toss some of the other eggs out. However, each of them is still able to successfully raise more of its own young than they would if each had its own nest because all the birds in the commune help feed the young.

The nonbreeding adults don't raise any of their own babies. They are helping raise younger brothers and sisters and cousins. But if they live long enough to become breeding adults, then they will have all the other birds in the commune to help them raise their babies.

# Acorn Woodpecker Challenges

- See a male. The red and white touch each other on the top of the male's head.
- See a female. There is a black band between the red and the white on the top of the female's head.
- See a granary tree. Notice that the acorns are driven in tip first.
- See several adult Acorn Woodpeckers together any time of the year.

Find more educational materials at [www.wintuaudbon.org/edu](http://www.wintuaudbon.org/edu)

