

BRONZED WOODPECKER

BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

THE Bronzed Woodpecker (*Piculus aeruginosus*) is an uncrested Mexican woodpecker about ten inches long. It is known also as the Lichtenstein's Woodpecker and Bronze-winged Woodpecker. In conversation I have recently heard it referred to as the Green Woodpecker or Mexican Green Woodpecker—apt enough names, to be sure, but unacceptable since the much larger, wholly different *Picus viridis* of the Old World has long been known as the Green Woodpecker.

The Bronzed Woodpecker's callnotes and behavior instantly remind the newcomer to México of a flicker (*Colaptes*). It is not white-rumped; it has no predilection for ants, so far as I know; and I have never seen it feeding on, or flying up from, the ground; but it has a flickerlike way of sitting quietly on a horizontal dead branch in the very top of a tree, tail not propping it against its perch, but hanging straight down. It also has a flickerlike courtship display. Three or four birds gather, spread their wings and tails, and bob and bow at each other while calling excitedly, interrupting their 'dance' with brief periods of statuesque motionlessness. A display of this sort I observed on April 18, 1941, along the Río Sabinas, in the Gómez Farías region of southwestern Tamaulipas (Sutton and Pettingill, 1942, *Auk*, 59:19).

When one sees the Bronzed Woodpecker for the first time one is apt to notice the bird's greenness. Actually, the crown is slate gray; the face white, passing from pale buff on the lores to grayish white on the auriculars; the throat grayish white streaked with dusky; the rest of the under parts olive, irregularly barred with yellowish white—but what one first sees, as the bird bounds along in flight, or hitches up a tree, is the mossy green of its upper parts. The wings have a golden brown, or bronzy, cast. In both the male and female the whole of the nape and hind neck are bright red. The moustaches of the male are red, of the female ashy gray, streaked with dusky. Young birds are strikingly similar to adults, sex for sex. A nestling male (wing and tail feathers much sheathed at base) in my collection is as brightly red on the hind neck and moustaches as the brightest adult male in my series. The specimen was taken May 27, 1949, at the Rancho del Cielo (elevation 3300 feet), near Gómez Farías, Tamaulipas, by Paul S. Martin. The nest, which held "at least three young" on that date, was near the top of a stubby dead 40-foot sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Ridgway (1914, *U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 50, Part 6, p. 130) states that in the young male the red of the nape extends "forward, along sides of crown and forehead, to base of bill." In the specimen to which I have just referred the red extends no farther for-

ward than the eyes. Dr. Herbert Friedmann informs me that the immature specimens Ridgway described may have been examples of *Piculus rubiginosus yucatanensis*. Two such specimens (from Chiapas and Tuxla, Veracruz) have been in the U. S. National Museum collection "from early enough to have been available to Ridgway and are probably the basis for his statement."

The Bronzed Woodpecker ranges from central Nuevo León and southern Tamaulipas southward through San Luis Potosí to Puebla and northern Veracruz. At the northern frontier of its range it is found only in the mountains. E. A. Goldman, in "Biological Investigations in México" (1951. *Smithsonian Misc. Coll.*, Vol. 115), calls it a species of the Humid Lower Tropical Subzone (p. 326) as well as of the Arid Upper Tropical Subzone (p. 330). It is non-migratory, but birds which summer high in the mountains may seek lower elevations in winter. In the Gómez Farías region of Tamaulipas, in the spring of 1941, the Cornell University-Carleton College Expedition found it "on the mountain as well as at river-level." That year, on March 27, in heavy forest about a thousand feet above the Sabinas, Dwain W. Warner collected a male with not very distinct brood-patch at a recently finished nest near the top of a 30-foot dead stub. On April 24, at river-level, Olin S. Pettingill, Jr. discovered a nest which probably held eggs or small young on that date (Sutton and Pettingill, *loc. cit.*). C. Richard Robins and William B. Heed (1951. *Wilson Bull.*, 63:266) inform us that at La Joya de Salas, Tamaulipas, at an elevation of 5500 feet, they observed a young bird "not long out of the nest but by itself" on May 25. On the Mesa de Chipinque (5300 feet), in the mountains just southwest of the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León, the species is fairly common, but I have never seen it thereabouts at city-level (1700 feet) even in winter. On May 7, 1941, I found two nests on the Mesa de Chipinque, each in the main trunk of a large oak about 12 feet above strongly sloping ground. A male specimen which I collected that day had greatly enlarged testes and well defined brood-patch. I found the nests by following the adults about, and I believe they were feeding young, but so far as I could tell they were not carrying food in their bills. Possibly they regurgitate food at the nest, again in the manner of a flicker.

Immediately to the southward of the range of *P. aeruginosus* lives another 'green' woodpecker, *P. rubiginosus*, which is very similar to the Bronzed. This form, called by E. R. Blake (1953. "Birds of Mexico," p. 290) the Golden-olive Woodpecker, ranges eastward to Yucatán and southward well into South America. So far as I have been able to ascertain, its range does not overlap that of *aeruginosus* in Veracruz or Puebla. A third and also very similar species, the Gray-crowned Woodpecker (*P. auricularis*), is confined to western México (Guerrero to southeastern Sonora). These three

woodpeckers may possibly be conspecific. They are much alike morphologically and what I have heard and read indicates that they are similar in behavior (see Sutton, 1951. "Mexican Birds," pp. 220-221). Blake (*loc. cit.*) states that *rubiginosus* is "more decidedly a bird of the lowlands" than *aeruginosus*, but Wetmore (1943. *Proc. U. S. Natl. Mus.*, 93:273) informs us that Carriker found *P. rubiginosus yucatanensis* "fairly abundant in the forest over the higher elevations of the Sierra de Tuxtla" in southern Veracruz, and the fact that Carriker obtained specimens on the Cerro de Tuxtla (elevation of peak proper about 4000 feet) and Volcán San Martín (elevation of peak proper about 5500 feet) but not, apparently, on lower slopes, forces us to question whether *rubiginosus* inhabits the lowlands of the Sierra de Tuxtla at all.

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NEW LIFE MEMBER

Karl William Haller was born October 12, 1916, at Wheeling, West Virginia. In 1939, he received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Biology from Bethany College, West Virginia. Two years later he was granted the degree of Master of Science in Zoology from West Virginia University. In 1937 he was a member of the Carnegie Museum—Cornell University expedition to Oklahoma, and in 1941 was a member of the Carnegie Museum expedition to Hudson Bay. After returning from more than four years service with the Air Force in World War II, he became an instructor in Biology and Zoology at Washington and Jefferson College, Pennsylvania. He subsequently returned to active duty with the Air Force. His active interest in birds extends over a period of 20 years. He is a member of the A.O.U., British Ornithologists' Union, and Cooper Ornithological Club.





Sutton, George Miksch. 1953. "Bronzed Woodpecker." *The Wilson bulletin* 65(2), 65–67.

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