

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER PREDATION ON A GREEN ANOLE

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At 16:30 on 13 April 1994, we observed an adult male Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) attack, kill, and eat a green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) on the Mississippi State University campus in Oktibbeha County. The weather was clear and warm. The habitat was not optimum for either species -- a large, closely mowed field with very widely scattered small trees. The woodpecker seized the lizard from the trunk of a 5-meter-tall laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), and, while holding it in his beak, thrashed it against the tree repeatedly. It temporarily wedged the lizard in the fork of a small branch and swallowed the lizard's tail (which had been severed from the body). With the lizard in its beak, the woodpecker then flew about 100 meters to a pecan tree (*Carya illinoensis*), where it again beat the lizard against the tree until it appeared lifeless. Then the Red-bellied lodged the lizard in a branch fork and began to pull it apart and eat it in several pieces. The woodpecker then flew again, out of our view, with some remains of the lizard.

Dennis (1951) also observed a male Red-bellied Woodpecker capture and kill a green anole. His Florida observation was of a woodpecker that flew to the ground to capture the anole, then back to a tree where the lizard was wedged into a "depression." The anole was then swallowed whole, head first. Beal (1911:50-51) also mentions finding anole remains in two of 271 Red-bellied Woodpecker stomachs examined.

The "thrashing" behavior we observed was also reported by Dennis (1951), but not in association with vertebrate prey. He observed a male Red-bellied slap a large caterpillar against a tree limb for "some time" before eating it.

In his classic study of the food habits of woodpeckers, F.E.L. Beal (1911) reported that the diet of the Red-bellied Woodpecker included about 31% animal matter and 69% vegetable matter. The animal matter was mostly insects, including an average of about 10% beetles, 6% ants, and about 6%

Orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets, and roaches). Bent also found the bones of a small tree frog in one stomach from Florida. More recent observers document the opportunistic nature of Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding habits. Kilham (1963) describes how they sometimes store food for later use, and Brackbill (1969) documented their taking eggs of other birds.

LITERATURE CITED

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