

BEHAVIOR OF A RED-CROWNED WOODPECKER AT AN UNUSUAL ROOST SITE IN VENEZUELA

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Abstract.—A Red-crowned Woodpecker (*Melanerpes rubricapillus*), observed in Venezuela, roosted in a pendulous icterid nest. Such a roost site has not been reported previously. Variability of entry time was not significantly different than variability of departure time. Mean roosting time was shorter than the mean night period. The behavior of this woodpecker suggests flexibility in roost-site selection.

LUGAR DE PERNOCTAR POCO USUAL PARA *MELANERPES RUBRICAPILLUS* EN VENEZUELA

Resumen.—Un individuo de *Melanerpes rubricapillus* fue observado pernoctar en un nido en forma de péndulo perteneciente a un icterido. Durante cuatro días el ave utilizó el nido para pernoctar. No hubo diferencias significativas entre las horas de entrada en las noches y salidas en las mañanas. El patrón de conducta de este pájaro carpintero nunca antes había sido informado en la literatura y sugiere flexibilidad en la selección de áreas de pernoctar por parte de estas aves.

Woodpeckers usually roost in tree cavities (see Bent 1939, Short 1982). In this note, I describe the behavior of a male Red-crowned Woodpecker (*Melanerpes rubricapillus*) using a previously unreported type of roost site. Observations were made between 12 and 30 Oct. 1986 and over 7.4 h with the aid of a spotting scope and 8 × 30 binoculars from the second and third floor of a hotel in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Monitoring began 6–31 min before roost departure and up to 23 min before roost entry.

On 12 Oct. 1986, I saw a male Red-crowned Woodpecker clinging to the side of an unoccupied icterid nest, possibly that of a Yellow Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*). The nest was suspended about 16 m above ground in an Apamate tree (*Tabebuia rosea* (Bertol)). The woodpecker entered the pendulous nest about 1828 and looked out of the nest entrance for most of the remaining 17 min during which I watched. Oncoming darkness made observation difficult, but since the bird made no effort to leave, I suspected that the nest was being used as a roost site. The following morning at 0627 a bird, believed to be the same individual left the nest. Again, poor light made identification difficult, but a dark bill and brown head were noted and a few minutes later a male Red-crowned Woodpecker was observed preening itself on a nearby limb. This roost was used by a Red-crowned Woodpecker, probably the same bird, for at least five nights (12, 14–17 Oct.). On at least two occasions a male was seen entering or leaving the nest. From observations made on the evenings of 18, 29, and 30 Oct., it appeared that the roost was not in use.

The average entry time was 1827 (SD = 5.0 min, $n = 4$) and the mean

morning departure time from the roost was 0627 (SD = 4.6 min, $n = 5$). Departure from the roost site was in the same direction and usually rapid. The variability of entry times was not significantly different from the variability of departure times ($P > 0.05$, Squared Ranks Test). The woodpecker entered the nest on the average 14.8 min (SD = 5.0 min, $n = 4$) before sunset and departed from the nest on average 4.8 min (SD = 4.9 min, $n = 5$) after sunrise. Roosting time (final entry to departure) averaged 718.0 min (SD = 4.8 min, $n = 4$) and was about 22 min shorter than the mean night period (sunset to sunrise) during 12–18 Oct., which was 739.5 min (SD = 1.0 min).

Skutch (1969) found that a male Red-crowned Woodpecker in Costa Rica during October frequently went to roost "an hour or more before nightfall." This is in contrast to the behavior of the male I observed in Venezuela which, during the same month but a different year, entered the roost nest less than 20 min before sunset. Also in Venezuela, Friedmann and Smith (1950) observed an individual going into an excavated tree cavity "Early in April . . . regularly at sundown, apparently to pass the night." In Costa Rica, Skutch (1969) observed another male enter its roost following sunset in February. Kilham (1972) noted two roost entry times in Panama, one at about 1740 and the other at 1820, 10 min after the bird's arrival at the roost tree. The latter entry time may have been influenced by the presence of other wildlife (Kilham 1972).

To my knowledge there are no published reports of picids roosting in suspended cupped nests (Pettingill 1970) of icterids. In Costa Rica (Skutch 1969) and Panama (Kilham 1972), Red-crowned Woodpeckers roost in tree cavities. Friedmann and Smith's (1950) observations at one site, suggest this may be true in Venezuela as well. Males, unlike females, excavate roosting cavities for themselves and these "dormitories" are usually more secure than roost sites chosen by females (Skutch 1955). The height above ground of the roost nest described in this note falls within the range (6–18 m) of dormitories seen by Skutch (1969) in Costa Rica.

The roost site described in this note is unusual in that it was not in a tree cavity and excavation was not required for its use. The male Red-crowned may have been opportunistic in his selection of a roost. Although both sexes were observed on the roost tree, two birds never entered the roost nest. These observations are consistent with those of Skutch (1969) who found that males and females roost separately. My observations also indicated that the bird roosted with its head near the opening of the entrance, a position facilitating escape behavior in the event of a predator's attack.

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