

NOTES

A MIXED PAIR OF SAPSUCKERS IN THE SIERRA NEVADA

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On 26 June 1973 I saw an adult Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) fly across a small meadow accompanied by another sapsucker so different from the former that it aroused my curiosity. The meadow is near Lee Vining Creek at about 7200 feet elevation on the east side of the Sierra Nevada and only a short distance off the Tioga Pass Road in Mono County, California.

On 1 July I again located this pair in dense Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*) along Lee Vining Creek. It was apparent I had a mixed pair of birds, the mate being a Red-naped Sapsucker (*S. nuchalis*). The latter was identified as a female by its white chin and upper throat. After watching them for a short time I located their nest in an Aspen (Figure 1). The nest cavity was about four feet off the ground on the south side of the trunk and had clearly been made that year since the ground below was heavily littered with fresh wood chippings. Both birds were seen entering the nest cavity with food, and the voices of young birds were heard.

I set up my blind and photographic equipment hoping to record this pair on film. As soon as I entered the blind the Red-breasted bird was at the nest with food for the young. He continued to bring food at an average of once each ten to fifteen minutes, undisturbed by the click of the camera and sudden burst of light from the electronic flash. However, the Red-naped bird appeared very timid and was reluctant to feed the young even though she could see her mate entering the nest cavity. The following morning the female had become accustomed to the blind and photographic equipment and came regularly to feed the young. It was interesting that during these two days it was always the male who removed the sawdust covered fecal sac. The nest was last checked on 6 July at which time both parents were still feeding the noisy young. In 1973 Laurence Weisser and I found five pairs of Red-breasted Sapsuckers nesting within 0.5 mile of this mixed pair.

Devillers (Calif. Birds 1:47-76, 1970) recently reviewed the status, distribution and identification of three forms of sapsucker in California. These three forms are treated as races of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*S. varius*) by Howell (Condor 54:237-282, 1952) and by the A.O.U. Check-list (1957). The Red-naped Sapsucker nests in the mountains from southeastern British Columbia and southwestern Alberta south to central Arizona and southern New Mexico. The Red-breasted Sapsucker nests in the extreme West from southeastern Alaska to southern California. In California the Red-naped Sapsucker is recorded nesting in the extreme northeast corner (Warner Mountains, Modoc County), and along the eastern border intermittently to Inyo County (White Mountains). Mixed pairs of *S. nuchalis* and *S. ruber* have been recorded in Modoc and eastern Mono counties, but hybridization appears to be infrequent. The Lee Vining Creek nesting is another documented record of hybridization between *S. nuchalis* and *S. ruber*, in an area where normally the Red-breasted Sapsucker is virtually alone.



Figure 1. A male Red-breasted Sapsucker (left) and a female Red-naped Sapsucker (right), members of a mated pair raising young on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada in Mono Co., California, 2 July 1973.

Photos by Wardene Wessler