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## LEWIS WOODPECKER IS AN EXPERT FLY CATCHER

The Lewis Woodpecker is not a difficult bird to recognize in the field. It is often called black woodpecker or crow woodpecker. As a rule, woodpeckers have a wavy flight, moving along with rapid beating of wings and then closing them for a moment as if gliding through the air. But this bird makes headway by steady flapping of his wings as does the crow or blackbird. Sometimes instead of alighting on the side of a stump in woodpecker fashion, he perches crosswise on a limb like the robin.

This woodpecker has developed a character that makes him very much unlike a typical woodpecker. In the first place, his iridescent greenish-black coat and his method of flying are more like those of a crow than any of our other woodpeckers. In the second place, he has departed somewhat from the ancestral habit of hard work in digging grubs out of old stumps, for he much prefers to cruise around in the air snapping up insects like a fly-catcher, and to vary his meals with fruits and berries like a robin. At certain times and places he has been known to store up acorns after the manner of his cousin, the California Woodpecker. One bird student saw a Lewis Woodpecker gathering numbers of May flies and sticking them into crevices of pines, generally in trees in which it nested, evidently putting them away for future use.

Near Klamath Falls we saw a band of six perched on a fence post. They were darting out and catching passing insects, returning usually to the same perch. They must have eyes like telescopes, for occasionally a bird would rise a hundred feet or more, snap up an insect and make an aerial slide back to his post.

The sight of a Lewis Woodpecker reminds one of the early

passing close by a pair of feet. He was not in a fighting mood and only wanted to reach cover. We headed him off time and again. It took some time to change his mind about escaping, then he coiled and lunged at us so rapidly that it kept us hopping. He meant business. Billie got busy with a couple of cameras, while I handled the snake and kept him in place.

The excitement changed to a steady routine, and the snake seemed to get used to it, but he continued striking if one came too near. He was on the defensive. I moved quietly about him, and once while Billie attracted his attention, I crept up to within a few feet of him and knelt down in the sand. I sat like a statue. The snake turned and looked at me, but since I was a dead lump and made no movement, he turned toward the clicking sound of the camera again. It has been my experience that using the animal's own method of "freezing" with a ticklish subject is the best way of pacifying him.

The strike of the rattler rarely exceeds half his own length, and he rears up from six to twelve inches. Heavy leather boots or puttees afford good protection for the legs. But a large rattler can puncture thin, flexible leather. A big rattler thoroughly alarmed is something to see and hear. The rattle is sounded continuously and the cornered snake inhales and exhales with a violent hiss.

Rodents such as rabbits, ground squirrels, prairie dogs, gophers, rats, and mice furnish the natural food for most species of rattlers. Birds are occasionally eaten, and some of the smaller species feed on lizards. A rattler always strikes and poisons its prey, for that is what the venom is for. Small animals die quickly from the poison and then are eaten, usually head first. The stomach juices are very powerful and every part is digested except hair and feathers. It is probable that in their natural state they eat at weekly intervals, if a full meal is obtained.