

Gila Woodpecker

By

Gerald R. Noonan PhD December 2012

These brash and often noisy birds are common in low elevation deserts that have large enough woody plants to provide nest sites such as saguaro cactus, large mesquite, or cottonwoods (Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). These omnivorous birds eat a variety of insects, cactus fruit, berries, nectar from flowers, seeds, small lizards, earthworms, eggs, and occasionally the young of smaller birds. They forage for food on tree trunks and cacti, on the outer branches of trees and shrubs and on the ground. They often drink sugar water from

hummingbird feeders.

Their nest is a cavity excavated in a large cactus or in a tree or sometimes in a palm trunk (Kaufman, 1996). Both parents work on excavating the nest, which is located approximately 8 to 30 feet above the ground. The female usually lays 3 to 4 eggs, sometimes up to six. The eggs are white in color. Both parents incubate them for approximately 14 days and feed the young. Scientists are not certain about the age at which young leaves



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Male Gila Woodpecker

the nest. There are 2 to 3 broods per year.

Recognition Characters: (Sibley, 2003). These woodpeckers are approximately 9.25 inches in length and have a wingspread of approximately 16 inches. The adults have a plain brown head and underside and uniformly barred back and wings. Males have a red cap on the top of the head.

References

- Kaufman, K. 1996. Lives of North American Birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xxv+675 p.
- Sibley, D. A. 2003. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc. 471 p.