

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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*Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian*  
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## Acorn Woodpeckers Are Beauties

*But they can damage houses and outbuildings*

By Chris Lavin



*This acorn woodpecker is where he or she is supposed to be, on a snag at Valle Vista Staging Area in Moraga, storing acorns in a tree, not in the side of a house.*

*Photo Chris Lavin*

The males' brilliant red heads are spectacularly beautiful – there is even a small patch of green feathers in the middle of their backs if you manage to get a close look – but there is a problem with acorn woodpeckers in Lamorinda. Their domain is spread throughout the area, but they don't just focus on trees.

"They love any wood," said Mario Martinez, of All N One Pest Control in Concord. He makes his living clearing people's houses from the mammals and birds that want to cohabitate against the owners' will. Does he get calls about acorn woodpeckers? "Oh, yeah," he said.

Acorn woodpeckers are brilliantly colored, small woodpeckers, about 8 inches long. Their call is like a laugh in the woods – general folklore has it that the laugh of Woody Woodpecker in the cartoon features the acorn woodpecker laugh, while the character's body is more like that of a pileated woodpecker, which is much larger. Lamorindans have the benefit of each species, and more.

According to Kate Marianchild, who wrote "Secrets of the Oak Woodlands: Plants & Animals Among California Oaks" (Heyday, Berkeley, 2014) acorn woodpeckers have an extremely developed social structure. They are one of the few species to raise their young in groups – yep, they share nests – which causes large numbers, up to 15 individuals, to congregate in one area. Not good for homeowners with large oak trees, where the birds collect the acorns and look for the best possible place to put them for winter.

The summer acorns are their prime target. The woodpeckers hammer out a hole that will just fit the acorn, then fetch it and deposit it in their granary. Hundreds or thousands of acorns can be deposited in a single tree.

While the International Union of Conservation of Nature does not list acorn woodpeckers as endangered, trapping them or killing them is still a no-no.

That has led to some homeowners setting up nets outside their houses to prevent the woodpeckers from landing in the first place. A new hole getting drilled right outside the bedroom window at 6 a.m. is not exactly a welcome sound.

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