

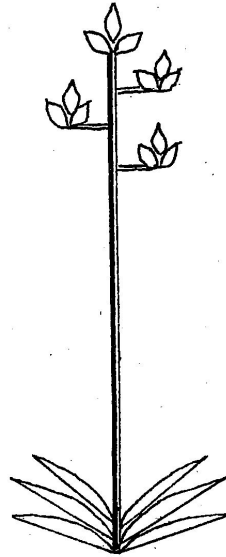
# Dead agave plants attract all kinds of birds and wildlife

from the CCIA  
Conservation Committee

Cortez  
John Brown

A friend who lived in Benson gave me an agave plant which I kept in a bucket for two years. When I moved to Cave Creek I transplanted the agave to the yard back of my patio. In the spring of 1974 this century plant produced a giant asparagus-like stalk that grew to an estimated height of 25 feet. This species of agave, *agave palmeri*, is not as handsome as some, but the humming birds and bees enjoyed the nectar of the blossoms as though they were the most beautiful. After the blooms were gone and the plant started dying, I left the stalk standing as the horizontal branches of the inflorescence offered the birds convenient perches.

Early the next spring I noticed a Ladderback woodpecker pecking away at the now dead stalk. In a short time he had a nice round hole chipped out and disappeared into the stalk. Thereafter he spent considerable time perched with only his head visible in his doorway. I enjoyed the



bright patch of color his red cap and striped face made against the tan coloring of the stalk.

Once when Ladderback was away, two house sparrows started examining the hole and chattering to

each other. Just then the Ladderback flew in, ran the sparrows off and perched in his doorway for a while. When he flew away the sparrows came back.

These maneuvers were repeated, so I dropped my work and settled down by the window to see what the outcome of this dispute would be. Soon the sparrows became a little bolder and the female sparrow disappeared inside the stalk. The Ladderback chose that moment to return, sized up the situation and also disappeared into the stalk.

A couple of seconds later the sparrow emerged with feathers flying and the pair left in a hurry. The victorious Ladderback straightened his somewhat ruffled feathers and settled down in his doorway where he remained for half an hour or more. The sparrows never returned to challenge his ownership.

We're inclined to remove all dead trees, stalks, etc., but often they provide ideal perching, nesting, viewing and photography sites and might be left to advantage.