



Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are interesting birds and among our favorite backyard visitors.

Woodpeckers have X-shaped feet, and most have two toes in front and two in back. This is called a zygodactyl arrangement, which enables them to grasp and grip vertical surfaces. They hop with both feet up tree trunks.

The bones in their tails are longer and their tails are more muscular than birds of similar size. Stiff tail feathers are used as a brace when hammering and are curved to allow for more surface contact.

The beak of a woodpecker is strong and hard with a chisel-shaped tip. Special muscles at the base of the beak and in the skull act as shock absorbers. Their nostrils are often covered with feathers to keep out wood chips.

A woodpecker's tongue is an incredible tool. Extremely long, sticky and strong, the tongue is used to pry insects from deep crevices and hold on to them like fly paper. Tiny serrations on the tongue help grab bugs. The tongue is so long that it actually wraps around the base of the skull when retracted. These amazing birds can peck 20 times per second and several thousand times per day.

Here in Minnesota, we have nine woodpeckers: Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, Red-headed, Black-backed, Three-toed, Pileated, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and the Northern Flicker, which is the only ground-feeding woodpecker in N. America.

To attract woodpeckers to your feeding station, offer a mix of peanut pickouts, suet and mealworms.



*Downy Woodpecker
by Nicole Perretta*

As much as we love woodpeckers, whenever birds and humans share habitat, conflicts can arise. Woodpeckers pound and peck for various reasons, sometimes in search of food or to create a nesting cavity. Woodpeckers will also drum to announce their territory or to attract a mate, sometimes using metal flashing or other structures that resonate loudly.

If the woodpeckers in your yard are damaging your house, make the areas in question less desirable while providing another place for them to feed away from the house. Hang a suet feeder 30' from the house to attract their attention and install woodpecker repelling items on or near the house to deter them.

We have several options available including:

Flash Tape or Scare Tape: red on one side and silver on the other.

Attack Spider: super sized, sound activated; drops down and climbs back up.

Bird Scaring Balloon: beach-ball sized with reflective eye shapes and flash tape.

Hawk Decal: window cling in the outline of a hawk

To discourage woodpeckers, first fill large holes with steel wool. Birds don't like the texture. For smaller holes, apply linseed oil in each opening. This kills the insects that are attracting the woodpeckers.

Drape a few 6' long strips of scare tape over the hole so that it flutters in the wind. Leave these items in place for a couple of weeks before removing and patching the area.

To scare woodpeckers from larger surface areas, twist long strips of flash tape and tack the ends diagonally across the house. Space the strips 3'-4' apart. Add 6" strips hanging vertically and attached only at the top to allow them to move freely in the wind.

Put the hawk decal window clings on any nearby windows.

Hang an Attack Spider or Scare Balloon from the overhang near the damage site.

Woodpeckers do not have a good sense of smell so odor repellents are ineffective. Nor have plastic owls been known to act as a deterrent. Woodpeckers, like most songbirds, are protected under state and federal laws and cannot be eliminated.



*Hairy Woodpecker
by Nicole Perretta
(note the lack of black spots on tail and proportionately larger beak)*