

Managing Acorn Woodpeckers in the Highlands

We are fortunate to live amongst the natural landscape of the Napa Valley. With the beauty of the oak trees and environment around us comes the occasional challenges of living with nature. Many homeowners are experiencing the impacts of Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) which inhabit our community.



Acorn Woodpeckers are an unusual communal bird. They live in family groups of up to a dozen or more individuals, and cooperate in raising young and in gathering, storing, and guarding food. Acorn Woodpeckers live year-round in oak woodlands like ours in western California and Oregon. These woodpeckers excavate multiple cavities in our large oak trees, any one of which may be used for nesting and nocturnal roosting. The woodpeckers reuse nest holes for many years

Their primary source of food are acorns in the winter and insects during the summer. The woodpeckers harvest acorns directly from oak trees and are famous in our community for their habit of storing the acorns in individually drilled holes in one or more storage trees. These are known as granaries and can have upwards of 50,000 nuts stored in them. Unfortunately with the fire eliminating many of their granary trees, they have also come to like the fascia of our homes – particularly under the eaves – as alternative granaries.

Acorn Woodpeckers – like all woodpeckers and songbirds – are protected by Federal law. According to the Federal Wildlife Services Officer in our area, the woodpeckers may not be ‘removed.’ The reality is that even if we could there are so many of them, and with their social behaviour, they would simply keep reproducing and repopulating.

Home Owner Recommendations

Based on our research and the recommendations of the Wildlife Services Officer, the HOA recommends the following strategies for homeowners:

1. *Motion or sound activated tarantula decoys* have, surprising, been found to be effective in deterring the birds. Hang them beneath the eaves where the damage is occurring. We recommend a ‘pulley’ system for mounting so you can easily lower to replace batteries. There are a number of these on the market. One option is the “Birds-Away Attack Spider” available from Amazon.
2. *Netting* Netting hung from the eaves blocks access for the birds and has proven effective. A simple line of netting hung from the eave and weighted with some heavy washers can work. The idea is to block their flight path.
3. *Owl Decoys* Holographic and other owl decoys may be effective. To work best, they should be moved every two or three weeks so the birds don’t become accustomed to them.



4. *Sound Machine Deterrents* A number of woodpecker-affected homeowners have chosen the BirdXpeller Pro as one of their strategies. Research has documented – along with recent experience in the Highlands – that the sound machine does have an effect on reducing bird attacks on homes. At the same time, we recognize that sound travels and may impact neighbouring homes. With adherence to a few guidelines, we hope those who choose this strategy can minimize the impact of the sounds on neighbours while maximizing the benefit of the device.



BirdXpeller Pro Sound Machine Use Guidelines

1. *Delay Interval* Users should set the device for the “X-Long” time off period. This will trigger the device only once every 20-25 minutes, or less than three times/hour.
2. *Time of Operation* Should be set to “Day Only” and will operate only during daylight hours.
3. *Bird Recording Settings* There are eight recorded bird call which play in random order. The length of calls if all eight are selected is 45 seconds. Users may want to deselect one or two recordings to shorten the length of the bird call time.
4. *Volume* The volume dial has three zones. Ideally the volume would be within the first range but never greater than midway on the second range.
5. *Location* While the device is most effective when aimed in the flight path of the birds, care should be taken not to aim the device directly at a neighboring house
6. *Occasionally Turn Off* It is helpful to occasionally turn the machine off for a few days so the woodpeckers do not become too accustomed to the sounds.