

Woodpecker

Trivia: The tongue is barbed and sticky and very long. It wraps around the skull. The skull has a cushion which protects the brain from impact. The feathers around the nostrils are like a built in dust mask. The feet, claws and tail feathers are specially designed to assist this bird with finding its insect prey. The Acorn Woodpecker has the call that the cartoon figure “Woody” was based on.

Woodpeckers are a valuable asset to keeping the forest healthy. They ‘feed primarily on wood-boring insects’. They consume gypsy moths, tent caterpillars, and grasshoppers. They DO NOT kill trees! A few species have a plant diet that consists of nuts, sap and fruit. There are 22 species of woodpeckers in the United States. Some are protected under the migratory bird act; others are endangered or threatened. The Sapsuckers are migratory however, the other species are year around residents.

Early spring mating and two week incubation will hatch 3 to 8 eggs. The nest is usually inside of free trunk cavities, stumps, wooden poles or man-made structures. Both parents feed the babies. The young leave the nest at 3 to 4 weeks of age. The young do not leave the nest until they can fly short distances – unlike some birds. The parents teach the young the skills needed to survive. If you see a young Woodpecker or Flicker on the ground, do not assume it is injured. Watch and wait – the parent is usually nearby calling to the ‘baby’ encouraging it to fly.

Prevention Tips:

Drumming (a means of marking their territorial) – make sure siding is secure or put filler behind the boards that sound hollow. Cover the chimney flashing with foam rubber or cloth until the habit has stopped. Hang netting, plastic sheeting, or screen from the eaves and suspend it several feet (if possible).

Feeding – The bird hears the ‘bugs burrowing in the wall’. Contact an insect exterminator and thank the woodpecker. There could be an infestation destroying your home. If it is a case of ‘mistaken identity’ such as water heater noise – see the tips listed above (hang free flowing netting etc).

Nesting – this is a seasonal behavior, if it can be discouraged for a few days the behavior will most likely not be repeated that year. By hanging material a few inches away from the wall – parallel to the house, the behavior will cease. If an overhang is not possible, simply attach a plank of wood over the area to be protected and staple the material to this plank. The barrier can be removed within a few days.

It may be beneficial to allow dead snags to remain on your wooded property. This allows the bird a place to nest; it also ensures the trees on your property will remain healthy since you have resident woodpecker(s).

Repellents:

There are no proven chemical repellents. No wood preservatives such as pentachlorophenol have been effective either.

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is an excellent resource. <http://birds.cornell.edu>
Tips on how to prevent birds from striking your window, www.flap.org

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