

WOODPECKERS,

Woodpeckers occur in all wooded sections of the world except the region of Australia and Madagascar, Some 350

kinds are known about half of which are found in North and South America, Chapman pictures 46 in his "Color Key to North American Birds", nine are listed in "Birds of Polk County" with the addition of Lewis's Woodpecker in "Birds of Iowa."

Above all other birds the woodpeckers are adapted for tree climbing, they are more fully outfitted than a line-walker, with two toes ^{directed} forward and two ~~directed~~ backwards, except in the three-toed group which has one toe backwards, armed with strong nails which enables them to grasp the bark of trees ~~and pull~~ up which they climb, supported by a stiff pointed tail of twelve feathers, used as a prop.

They possess highly specialized equipment for the business of making a living, with their narrow neck, heavy head and chisel-like bill,

If you had never heard of a woodpecker and were told the bird drilled holes in solid wood by beating its head against a tree, you would most likely regard the story as fiction,

Its beak serves as a chisel and hammer to drive in and pry apart the trunks of both alive and decayed wood. The skull is large in proportion to the neck and heavy-boned to resist the strain of sharp blows,

Imagine how it would feel if our own mouths were extended a yard before our noses and the jar it might give if we attempted to split even soft logs with them!

If we watch a woodpecker drilling we see that he draws back his

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head and body to the greatest possible distance from the tree, striking with all his force, sending his strong beak powerfully into the wood. The skull is thick and hard, its connection with the beak is strong, but at the same time springy and jar-absorbing, the membrane which surrounds the brain is also thick and strong.

One of the rarest things about the woodpecker is its tongue, it is an aid to the beak in being a knife, fork and spoon, they work together in finding the deep-lurking enemies of the tree. Ordinarily

the tongue lies in the depression of the lower mandible, it is slender and its upper surface is covered with minute spines, directed backwards; its tip is hard as horn, with many strong barbs making a weapon more effective than a fish spear. The machinery for

thrusting it forth is perfect, the bone of the tongue has two branches passing downward and backward and round-about the head ending in the nostrils toward the end of the upper mandible, or coiled about the bony part of the eyeball. By means of this apparatus

the tongue may be extended, as in the Hairy Woodpecker, ~~it~~ ^{to} reach an inch and a half beyond the end of the bill. The

tongue is propelled forward, at need, by powerful muscles, so that when the bird has drilled to the burrow of a boring beetle it can open the beak slightly, protrude the tongue, spear the insect and draw it back into the mouth.

Woodpeckers climb by a series of upward leaps and never descend head first like the nuthatches; they are rather clumsy on the ground and progress by hopping. Their flight is deeply

undulatory, making festoons, except the Piliated, which maintains an even course.

Many are the calls and cries but nothing that is musical. The Flicker is said to have as many as 40 different notes. All species have the rolling rattles, produced by rapid beating on dead limbs, loose boards, mail boxes, tin roofs, or what-not, this is their love call, being heard only in the mating season.

The nests are in holes in trees, living and dead, posts, poles, or similar situations, the eggs are on chips, no nest is made, those who provide nesting boxes should see that chips are at the bottom of the cavity. In common with other hole nesting birds the eggs are white, and glossy as if nail polish had been used, not the dull texture of a hen's egg.

young nest
There are few birds that reveal their family connections as do the woodpeckers, if one becomes familiar with the appearance and activities of just one woodpecker, he will then be able to recognize at once any other member of the family he may find; very different from the meadow lark, which is strikingly unlike its relatives the bobolink, oriole, and red-winged blackbird in habit and color.

An interesting example of popular bird knowledge ^{versus} ~~scientific~~ scientific knowledge is demonstrated in two woodpeckers of Southern Texas, the Golden-fronted is a near relative to the Red-bellied, in scientific classification, but is far from it in habitat, color, and actions, to my popular mind this Golden-fronted is much like our flicker, yellow on it, leaves habitation, is found in just such places as we find the Flicker, while the Texas Woodpecker, which is ~~akin~~ of the same family as the Hairy and the Downy, is much more like the Red-bellied,

The Texas Woodpecker frequents the isolated chaparral areas which grow scrubby mesquite and cactus. Living as it does in regions where large trees are absent, one need not be surprised to find the nest within a few feet of the ground. The advent of telephone and telegraph poles in recent years has been much to their liking: my daughter's husband with the Southern Bell Telephone Company, reports a great loss annually by this woodpecker with its hole drilling habits; the company has even ~~even had~~ conferences, calling in ornithologists for consultation, while the woodpeckers drilled ^{merrily} on.

No other birds leave behind such striking evidence of their presence, a hundred thousand warblers may nest and rear their young in a small region, when they have gone there is little sign of their former residence, but a half dozen woodpeckers in the same territory will leave numerous holes in dead trees, and entrances to their nesting cavities, all bearing ^{convincing} testimony to their former diggings.

young All woodpeckers feed their young by regurgitation, when the little ones are old enough to come to the mouth of the nesting hole, this alarming "stab" method may be observed.

Woodpeckers give the impression of being practical, sensible birds, they are known as hard-working, substantial citizens of the bird world, rendering service that could ill be spared.

Northern Flicker,

The habits, notes, and color of this well known bird are reflected in the popular names which have been applied to it throughout its wide range, no less than 124 of these have been recorded; some of the most distinctive are:

Golden-winged Woodpecker, High Hole, Wake-up, Yellow Hammer, yellow Jay and Pigeon Woodpecker.

The Flicker is a bird of character, although a woodpecker he is to original to fellow in the footsteps of others of his tribe they, as a rule do not frequent the ground, but, he being an individualist, finds no reason why he should not honor his own fondness for ants, which forms a large part of his daily feed by seeking the ground, often he is flushed from his ant hunting haunts and goes bounding off through the air his white rump showing conspicuously as he flies.

The Flicker is the most generally abundant and well known of all American Woodpeckers, country people, almost every where are familiar with the bird,

Try and describe one, seems to me, there are more curious colors, mixtures, and markings than ^{on} any one other one bird, however his polka-dot vest is always in evidence on a front view, ~~as in~~.

The Red-shafted Flicker, occurring occasionally in Iowa, differs from the Northern chiefly in that the mustache mark in the male is red instead of black, Miss McCabe found one in July, 1924.

The Flicker is an obliging carpenter for other members of the bird world, Sparrow Hawks, Blue Birds, Tree Swallows, and small Owls are largely dependent on it for nesting holes.

The relative abundance of this species on the Christmas Census, since 1924 has been from 1 to 21.

Miss Sherman wrote an exhaustive account of various nestings observed between 1903 and 1910, seven years, in a 36 paged article in Wilson Bulletin in 1922.

I hope I am going to live long enough to see a Piliated Woodpecker. Now that, in recent years, it is increasing in Iowa, it having been listed from ten counties, it would seem all I should have to do is to go where it has been reported. Just imagine a crow with stunning red and white markings, with a background of deep woods romance,

He is a master workman in the guild of wood-buers, and a skilled carpenter without being a member of the union, as evidenced by the attack on a living tree, dead and infested at the core, showing the marvelous skill and great strength of the bird. The chisel-like bill, driven by powerful and resounding blows cuts the sound wood with all the precision and effectiveness of a human workman; great square holes are cut and the ground is strewn with chips like those from a woodsman's ax,

The bird is known in local vernacular as Black Woodpecker, Leg-cock, Black Cock-of-the-Woods and ~~many~~ erroneously as Weed-cock, perhaps a confusion with Leg-cock.

If it had been my commission to name the Red-bellied Woodpecker I think I could have chosen a name more ^{fitting} ~~descriptive~~ ^{to} of the bird, for surely the belly is not red enough to justify that name. The red from beak to back is of such peppy brilliancy that going R&R and calling him Red Cap wouldn't be so bad.

The name Zebra Bird is most descriptive of his back, and "Chad" from his call is another.

When Andersen published his "Birds of Iowa" in 1907 there

30 -
were only three Iowa records, while this year's Christmas ^{Census} yielded

29. The invasion into Minnesota has gone on in like manner.

Well do I remember the first one I saw, years ago, near 27th and
Hickman, flying with an acorn in its mouth, now we have it daily

at the suet rack, feeding on the side farthest from the house.

When we moved in July immature birds were hunting in a walnut

tree, looking like animated pieces of bark, they were often seen

up to the autumn when I presume a molt brought a new coat.

The Red-bellied is conspicuous on account of its color, its

actions, and its voice. It is almost impossible for one to escape

the attention of an observer in the same woods for it is seldom

still for any length of time, ascending one tree after another

with a peculiar jerky motion, uttering a noisy squirrel like

call at every hitch.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is so well named not a single

synonym has been found. This is the bird that first excited

the interest of Alexander Wilson in ornithology, he was the

author of the first bird books to be published in the U.S.

It is one of the most frequent birds of the roadside, perching

on poles and fence posts and unfortunately its passing and

repassing across the highways and alighting in the roadways,

places it in the lead of birds killed annually by automobiles.

The Red-head is an abundant summer resident, but an irregular

winter resident, on the Christmas Census in 1926 not one was

reported, in '27 fifty were counted and in '28 fifty-nine.

It has without doubt been proven that years of many acorns

they will stay, but no acorns and they move along.

This winter there is a pair each in Greenwood Park and Ashworth Park, a visit to either territory finds them within their own small radius; occasionally a pair visits our suet presumably the ones west of Greenwood Lake, two blocks away.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are inconspicuous ^{spring and autumn} migrants with us, rarely remaining to nest. Kenneth Nelson reports the only nesting record in Polk Co.

On reaching their summer home their character is said to change, they become noisy and rellicking in true woodpecker fashion.

"Birds of Minnesota" devotes much space to the destructive habits of this bird in puncturing the bark of trees for sap, which feature holds little concern for us locally for their injury to our trees, in migration is negligent.

They have been observed as early as March 13th, Fletcher, and as late as Oct. 17th, McCabe.

The hairy Woodpecker gets its name from the white ^{feather's} of the back falling over the black borders in a loose disconnected way, faintly suggestive of hair. It is some times called the Guinea Woodpecker and the Downey the Little Guinea. Except in size the one difference between these two is the side feathers of the Hairy's tail are all white while those of the downey are spotted with black.

The Hairy is a woodland bird, hence it is seen less often than the Downey which so frequently comes to trees about houses. The records of the Christmas Census show a consistent average of two Downies to one Hairy?

The Downey is a sociable fellow, when approached instead of flying away it often works around to the other side of the tree or limb up which it may be climbing, remains quiet for a few minutes, it will peep around to see if you are still there and may then continue its search for feed, or if alarmed fly to a near-by tree.

The Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker has but two Iowa records one by Savage in 1885 and the other by Watson in Crocker Woods in 1924. So the observer can always keep this in the back of his head some day he might see one!

winter