

Woodpeckers



Pileated Woodpecker

Multiple species of woodpeckers are common in Wisconsin and will often visit bird feeders. They add diversity to your yard and are an integral part of the ecosystem. Woodpeckers use their strong bill to create nesting cavities, search for insects, attract a mate or alert others of their claim to a territory. Their actions can result in damage to utility poles, residences and other wood structures. Excavations into dwellings can create heating and cooling inefficiencies, water leaks and other maintenance issues. Drumming on gutters, chimney caps and other metal objects can be annoying, but usually do not involve actual damage. Drumming is most common early mornings in spring and early summer and usually stops by mid-summer. The best way to reduce or eliminate damage is to address it soon after discovery, utilizing as many suggested techniques as feasible.

Don't Feed Wildlife

- Providing food for woodpeckers at your bird feeder, such as suet, will keep the birds in your yard and may result in increased damage to your house. If you are having nuisance issues with woodpeckers, take down bird feeders and clean up spilled bird seed until the woodpeckers relocate.

Damage Identification

- Woodpeckers typically prefer soft or decomposing wood for excavations. Replacing weathered or rotten boards may lessen their interest. However, cedar or laminate wood sidings—even new—are the most often damaged siding type in Wisconsin. Hairy or Downy woodpeckers typically make a 2 inch round or slightly oblong hole, often on the south or west facing side of the building. Most holes that go completely through the siding are for winter shelter and nesting. Damage that is in a linear pattern and does not go through the wood may indicate woodpeckers seeking insects.

Discourage Woodpeckers

- Suspend bird netting a few inches from your house, such as hanging from your roofline, around damaged areas to prevent continued access.
- Hardware cloth, sheet metal, or steel wool can be applied directly to the damaged area, if it's a small enough spot. Be aware this may simply move the woodpeckers activity to another portion of the house.
- Tack aluminum foil, Mylar flagging or a mirror to the damaged area. The movement or reflection can frighten woodpeckers away.
- Making loud noises, waving arms, or spraying the woodpecker with the hose when you see it may eventually frighten the bird away, although this may be needed 2–3 times a day for 2–3 weeks.
- Offering the woodpecker an alternative nesting box near where the damage has occurred has proven successful. Plans can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/projects/downy.html>
- If you have existing woodpecker problems, you may have an insect problem underneath the siding. Contacting a pest extermination company may help to mediate the issue.
- Applying a wood preservative to your siding and using caulk to fill holes or cracks may minimize the potential for insect activity and thus decrease attention from woodpeckers before the problems start.



Woodpecker Damage (pointed out by arrows)

Quick Facts

- Wisconsin is home to 8 different species of woodpecker. The Downy and Hairy are the most likely to cause damage.
- Woodpeckers have a stiff, spiny tail and zygodactyl feet (two toes to the front, two to the rear) that helps to prop them up while climbing and looking for food.
- The Downy woodpecker is the smallest woodpecker at 6 inches long and the Pileated is the largest at 17 inches long.
- The Red-headed Woodpecker, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and the Northern Flicker are the only woodpecker species that migrate.
- Because woodpecker species are federally protected migratory birds, lethal removal of birds or nests with eggs is allowed only through consultation with USDA Wildlife Services and permit issuance by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Contact the USDA Wildlife Services at 1-800-433-0663 (in southern Wisconsin) or 1-800-228-1368 (in northern Wisconsin).

For more information, visit our webpage:

dnr.wi.gov

WM-587 2014

