



WOODPECKERS

REPRODUCTION

Woodpeckers breed in the spring, commonly laying 2 to 6 eggs. Incubation is short, usually lasting 11 to 14 days, but longer for larger species. Most species are born naked; some are born downy. In all species, young are tended by both parents. The production of 2 broods per year is common, and some species may have 3. Young leave the nest in 20 to 30 days.

NESTING COVER

Woodpeckers nest in cavities in trees or structures. Nest cavities are hollowed out areas below and perpendicular to the entrance. Cavities may be chiseled into tree trunks, branches, or structures or may be natural or pre-existing cavities. Both sexes sleep in nest cavities throughout the year.

Some species, such as downy and hairy woodpeckers, excavate new cavities each year. Others, such as northern flickers, return to the same cavity annually. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers prefer to excavate cavities in live trees, while red-headed and pileated woodpeckers favor dead trees.

BEHAVIOR

Most woodpeckers live year-round in the same area in small social groups. A few species, such as northern flickers and red-headed woodpeckers, are migratory. Lewis' woodpeckers occasionally may be seen in flocks of several hundred during some seasons.

HABITAT

Woodpeckers are dependent on trees for shelter and food and generally are found in or on the edge of wooded areas. Red-headed woodpeckers reside in areas of low elevation along stream courses or in open country with extensive grasslands and small woodlots. Red-bellied woodpeckers occupy

habitat similar to that of red-headed woodpeckers as well as openings in mature forests, wooded wetlands, and large trees in open pastures. Three-toed and black-backed woodpeckers inhabit mixed coniferous and deciduous forests. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are found in heavily forested areas. Downy and hairy woodpeckers are widespread and common in almost any habitat where deciduous trees occur and are common suburban residents. The northern flicker is common in habitats ranging from city parks to heavily forested areas, though it has experienced significant declines in recent years. Pileated woodpeckers are common in mature and extensive forests, except in coastal lowlands.

FOOD HABITS

Most woodpeckers feed primarily on tree-living or wood-boring insects, but may feed on a variety of other insects including ants, wasps, and bees found on trees. Northern flickers commonly feed on ants they gather from the ground. Many woodpeckers also feed on berries, fruit, nuts and seeds, particularly when insects are not available. Woodpeckers use sharp, pointed beaks to drill into trees in search of food and to excavate nest cavities. Bristly feathers around their nostrils prevent wood dust from entering their nostrils as they chisel. Woodpeckers have long tongues that wrap around the skull and anchor at the base of the bill. The tip of the tongue typically is barbed to extract insects from holes, and the tongue is coated with sticky saliva, which helps to keep hold of prey.

Yellow-bellied sapsuckers feed on sap that oozes from horizontal rows of small holes they drill into tree trunks. Their tongues are shorter and have fine, hair-like processes on the tip that helps collect sap by capillary action. Sap also serves as a trap from which insects can be harvested.

Source: *Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management, <http://icwdm.org/>*