

ATTRACTING WOODPECKERS

Although some of Ontario's woodpeckers migrate (Northern Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers), others stay around all winter and can be attracted by suet feeders. Downy Woodpeckers are most easily tempted into backyards, however the similar looking, but larger Hairy Woodpecker may also be seen.

ONION BAG FEEDER

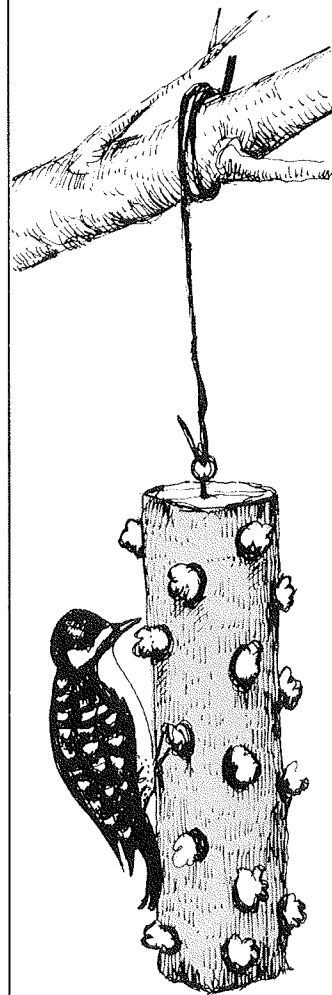
You can feed the birds and recycle at the same time. Forget the onions, just use the net bag they come in to make this odour-free feeder.

You'll need: net bag, like the ones onions are sold in (do not use wire mesh)

- 1 ft. string
- suet
- birdseed

How to:

- 1) Make your suet by melting beef fat (not pork because it's too salty) and then cooling it.
- 2) Shape the suet into a ball and roll it in birdseed.
- 3) Place the ball into the net bag and hang it from a branch with string.



SUET LOG FEEDER

Make a woodpecker's life easier. With this feeder you drill the holes and provide the food. All they need to do is show up and eat.

You'll need: small log (about 40 cm long and 10-12 cm thick) made of poplar or birch

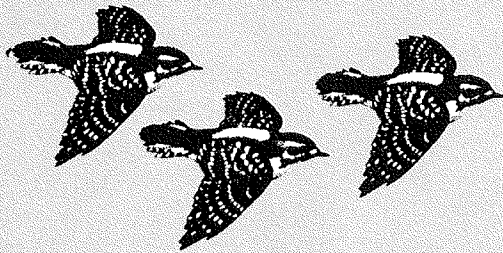
- a hand drill
- one eye-screw
- 1 ft. strong but bendable wire
- suet

How to:

- 1) Make your suet by melting beef fat (not pork because it's too salty) and then cooling it.
- 2) Drill several holes 1-2 cm deep and 2.5 cm wide, down and around your log. To get holes this big, use your largest drill bit and then enlarge the hole around the edges.
- 3) Attach an eye-screw to one end.
- 4) Fill the holes with suet.
- 5) Hang the log with wire from a branch.

YOU CAN HELP

Woodpeckers need dead and decaying trees for feeding and nesting habitat. Instead of removing these trees from your property, remember to leave some for the woodpeckers and the many other species of wildlife that will welcome your hospitality.



ARE YOU BIRDWISE?

Explore the world of birds with fascinating facts and amazing activities in the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' new book, *Birdwise*, written for kids. Ask for it at your local bookstore or library.

Birdwise by Pamela Hickman, illustrated by Judie Shore. Published by Kids Can Press, Toronto, 1988.

Black-backed Woodpecker



Written by Pamela Hickman
Design & Illustration by Judie Shore

Wonderful Woodpeckers

You'd probably get a headache if you banged your head against a tree, but woodpeckers don't seem to mind. In fact, as their name implies, these birds are well adapted for pecking on trees. Woodpeckers belong to the Family Picidae and are found everywhere in the world except Madagascar, Australia and New Zealand.

HAMMER HEADS

Woodpeckers spend a lot of time chiselling out cavities in trees for nesting holes, roosting holes and for feeding. All this work requires special tools. Woodpeckers are equipped with large, straight, hard, tapered beaks that are perfect for excavating holes in trees. Powerful neck and head muscles allow the birds to hammer away at the tree trunks, while thick skull bones act as shock absorbers.

TONGUE-TIED?

Most people recognize a woodpecker's large, strong beak, but have you ever wondered what its tongue looks like? Insect-eating species have a perfect design for catching food. Like a fishing lure, the end of the tongue has a hard tip with barbed hooks along the side. They also have glue-like saliva for hanging on to their prey.

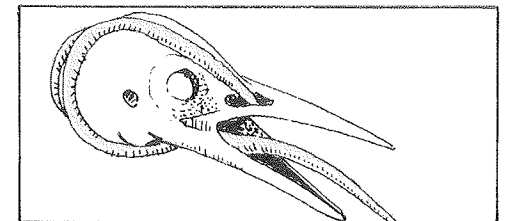
The tongue itself is attached to a series of bones and elastic-like tissue called the hyoid. This lies under the woodpecker's jaw, curves around the back of the skull and is anchored in the right nostril (see illustration). When the bird wants to feed, the hyoid slides forward and the tongue shoots out, snaking its way into the holes already drilled into the tree. The tongue can reach up to five times farther than the bill!

HANGING ON

Since most woodpeckers spend a lot of time clinging to tree trunks, they have special adaptations to help them hold on. Most have four toes: two pointing forward and two pointing backward (most birds have only one toe in the back). The long toes and deeply curved claws help a woodpecker grab onto the tree. In addition, its tail is made of very strong, stiff feathers that press against the tree trunk to support the bird while it feeds.

THAT'S LIFE

Woodpeckers usually chisel out a nesting cavity in dead trees, stumps or branches (Hairy Woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers prefer live trees). This can take less than a week, with both male and female sharing the work. The cavities are not lined. Instead the 4-8 white eggs are laid on the scattered wood chips inside. Young are completely naked when they hatch, and grow slowly. Nestlings tend to be very vocal, often giving away the location of a nesting cavity. They remain in the hole until they can fly well - a period of up to a month. Nest holes are usually abandoned after one season but became new homes for many other species, including Wood Ducks, Common Goldeneyes, Screech Owls, Saw-whet Owls, Crested Flycatchers, Tree Swallows, chickadees, bluebirds and squirrels. Some species, such as Buffleheads, are almost completely dependent on these holes for nesting sites.



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FEDERATION OF ONTARIO NATURALISTS, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2W8 (416) 444-8419

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

Woodpeckers usually drum on trees, but you may get one tapping on your drainpipe or tin roof. Why? Like young children, woodpeckers love to make noise. Instead of singing like many other birds, they drum in order to claim their breeding territory and attract a mate. The noisier the better and your drainpipe is a lot louder than a tree.

Many woodpeckers have distinctive tapping sounds as well as separate calls which can be used for identification in the field.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Woodpeckers have been reported to act as terrific insect pest controllers in forests and farmlands. For instance, one report states that Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers reduced an insect pest population in a Nova Scotia apple orchard by 52%. Sometimes, though, woodpeckers can be a problem when their insect eating habits extend to your shingles, siding or whole house. If you've got a problem, write for our brochure *Living with Woodpeckers*. Send .50 and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2W8. Most often, however, woodpeckers are just another fascinating part of nature to enjoy.

Four toes

Three toes



Three-toed Woodpecker

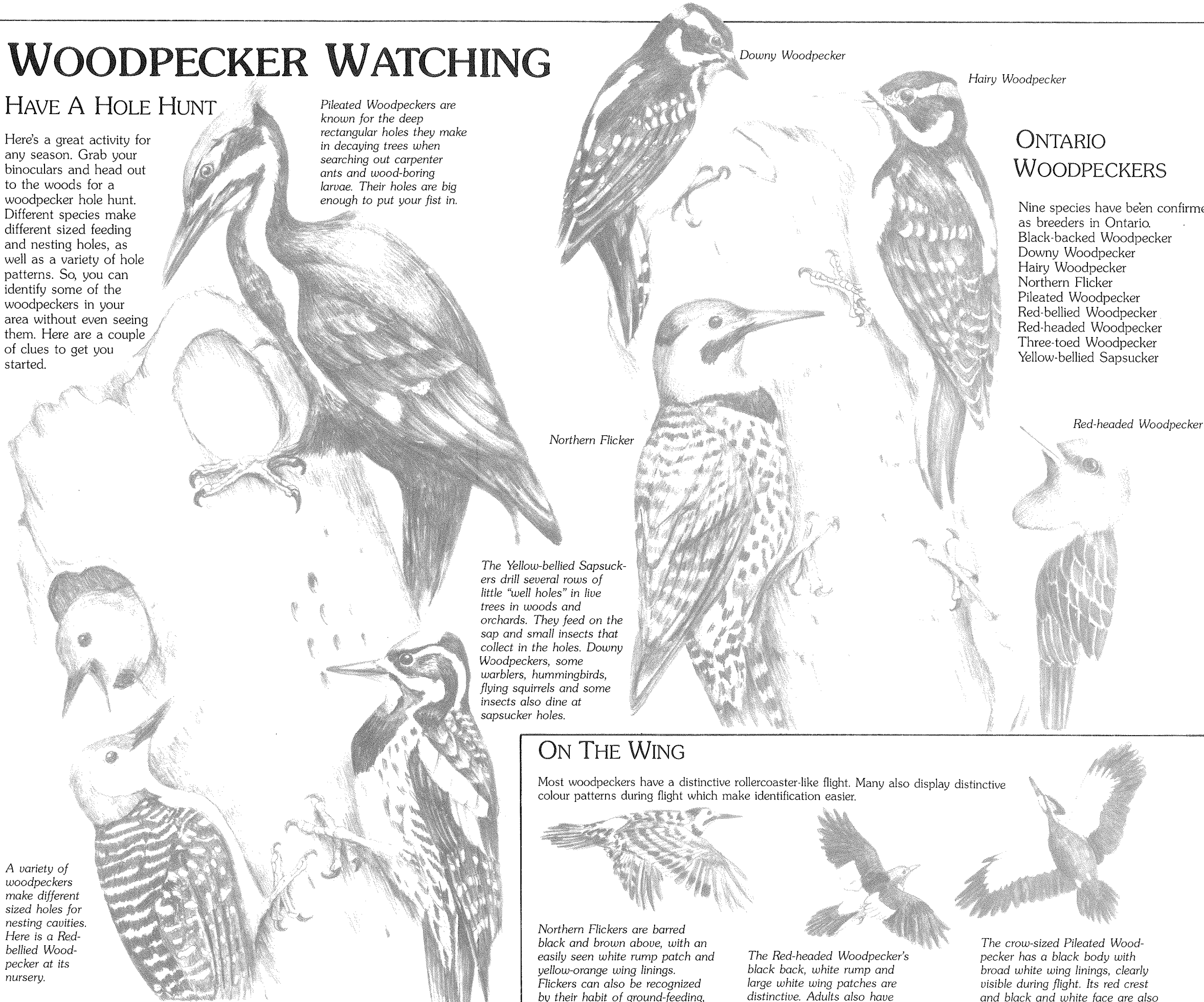


WOODPECKER WATCHING

HAVE A HOLE HUNT

Here's a great activity for any season. Grab your binoculars and head out to the woods for a woodpecker hole hunt. Different species make different sized feeding and nesting holes, as well as a variety of hole patterns. So, you can identify some of the woodpeckers in your area without even seeing them. Here are a couple of clues to get you started.

Pileated Woodpeckers are known for the deep rectangular holes they make in decaying trees when searching out carpenter ants and wood-boring larvae. Their holes are big enough to put your fist in.



Northern Flicker

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

ONTARIO WOODPECKERS

- Nine species have been confirmed as breeders in Ontario.
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Red-headed Woodpecker

The Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers drill several rows of little "well holes" in live trees in woods and orchards. They feed on the sap and small insects that collect in the holes. Downy Woodpeckers, some warblers, hummingbirds, flying squirrels and some insects also dine at sapsucker holes.

A variety of woodpeckers make different sized holes for nesting cavities. Here is a Red-bellied Woodpecker at its nursery.

ON THE WING

Most woodpeckers have a distinctive rollercoaster-like flight. Many also display distinctive colour patterns during flight which make identification easier.



Northern Flickers are barred black and brown above, with an easily seen white rump patch and yellow-orange wing linings. Flickers can also be recognized by their habit of ground-feeding, unlike other woodpeckers.

The Red-headed Woodpecker's black back, white rump and large white wing patches are distinctive. Adults also have completely red heads.

The crow-sized Pileated Woodpecker has a black body with broad white wing linings, clearly visible during flight. Its red crest and black and white face are also distinctive.