

Woodpecker Damage Control for the Florida Homeowner

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Woodpeckers are interesting birds and a beneficial part of our natural environment. In man's urbanized environment, these woodpeckers can cause serious damage and become an unwanted nuisance. Many species of woodpeckers are found in Florida and they all are capable of damaging buildings. These species include the small downy woodpecker (*Dendrocopus pubescens*), the slightly larger hairy woodpecker (*D. villosus*), the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*D. borealis*), the red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), the red-bellied woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*), the yellow-shafted flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), and the large pileated woodpecker (*Drycopus pileatus*).



red-cockaded woodpecker



pileated woodpecker.

Woodpeckers are migratory, nongame birds protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and local ordinances. This factsheet will provide suggestions for control of woodpecker damage near private residences, with some applications for controlling damage to commercial properties.

WOODPECKER DAMAGE

Drumming

During courtship, most woodpeckers proclaim their existence to prospective mates through flight displays, calling or drumming. Surfaces for drumming, a form of communication between woodpeckers, are readily available in our urban/suburban environment. Wood siding, wood covered fireplace chimneys, rain gutters and down

spouts, vent caps, and dead trees or large limbs are ideal tapping surfaces. While little damage may occur, the tapping can be very annoying.

Feeding

Wood from trees is one of the major sources of insects that woodpeckers seek as food sources. In addition, wood used in a man-made environment is apparently recognizable by woodpeckers, even if it is a utility pole, fencepost, wood siding on a house, window frame, or the woodpile for the fireplace. They will actively search for insects or other foods and this means pecking, chipping, or flaking the wood. Certain types of plywood siding contain tunnels which are opened when the plywood is grooved. Insects sometimes utilize these openings and become a prime food attraction for woodpeckers.

Current trends in home building toward us of more wood siding and large reflective windows have significantly increased problems of woodpecker damage. Woodpeckers are attracted to buildings for several reasons. Sometimes birds accidentally fly into reflective windows, not recognizing the reflective surface. Once there, and if still alive, it is their nature to peck. These reflective surfaces often stimulate a territorial or breeding behavior response. The bird does not realize the "other woodpecker" is merely its own reflection. Once on the building, they will peck. All too often, they will return repeatedly to peck the wood surface.

Nesting

Woodpeckers that utilize a building for feeding and drumming also may try to nest there. Nesting holes may be hammered completely through the siding and insulation. Often a number of such cavities will be started until the bird finds a suitable situation for the nest site .



nest site.

CONTROLLING THE DAMAGE

How can you stop woodpecker damage? Successful control is dependent upon early recognition of damage and prompt action. The longer corrective action is delayed, the more difficult it will be to stop the bird's activity. **A homeowner's effort must be persistent.** First, check for insects since this food source may be the main attraction for woodpeckers. If insects are present, contact your County Extension Agent or qualified pest control company for their recommendations on insect control.

Check your yard for dead trees or large dead limbs. The bird may be attracted to the tree initially and then to the building. Remove the dead material. Bird feeders, especially those for woodpeckers, may be used to lure the bird away; but, more importantly, they may have initially attracted the offending woodpecker. Therefore, the feeder may need to be moved or removed.

Scaring

Scaring or hazing woodpeckers may be successful if started promptly. The scaring method relies upon the bird's senses to respond to danger or an unpleasant experience. Occasionally a homeowner may be successful in discouraging the bird with water from a garden or high-pressure water hose. Objects that move are more effective than inanimate objects. Aluminum foil strips cut 2 to 3 inches in width, 2 to 3 feet in length with a string attached to one end of each strip may be attached at damaged or tapping sites. Light pie plates and metal can lids can be suspended on a string and passed through the eyelets which are screwed into the house near the damaged or drumming site. One end of the string can be near a convenient window or door where the line can be jerked whenever the bird appears. Pinwheels with reflective vanes may be attached at tapping or damage sites. Be sure the revolving vanes move freely.

Models or silhouettes of snakes, owls, or hawks may be mounted at the problem sites. In conjunction with these, the playing of recorded calls of birds of prey may be used to augment the threat. Also, vocalizations of woodpecker distress calls played for short, irregular intervals on continuous loop tapes have been successfully used. These recorded bird calls should be available in better sporting goods stores.

Exclusion

Woodpeckers may be excluded from some surfaces by covering with plastic or nylon netting or hardware cloth. Permanent installation of hardware cloth or other screening may be the best solution when woodpeckers make repeated attempts over several years to make holes or nests. Metallic or wooded surfaces used for drumming may be wrapped or covered with cloth or foam. An alternative tapping site or surface such as a wooden box or metal cylinder hung is a less annoying location may be considered.

Repellents

Chemical repellents such as naphthalene moth repellent in mesh bags pinned to the siding and sticky bird repellents have only limited value. Repellents may stain the surface or collect dirt.

Removal

Removal of the offending bird is a very last resort. Killing or live capture of birds can only be done by special permit from State and Federal agencies. State permits may be obtained from:

- Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
- 620 S. Meridian
- Tallahassee, FL 32301

The Federal permits are obtained from:

- Special Agent in Charge

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- P. O. Box 4839
- Atlanta, GA 30303.

After the problem is resolved, repair all damage to prevent further problems by woodpeckers, squirrels, insects, and mildew or fungus. Special or unusual problem situations can be referred to:

- Florida Wildlife Assistance
- USDA APHIS
- 227 N. Bronough, Suite 1022
- Tallahassee, FL 32301.

Footnotes

1. This document is Fact Sheet WRS 3, a series of the Department of Wildlife and Range Sciences, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: 1985.

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