

## Woodpecker Control Information

On line at: [mndnr.gov/birds/woodpeckers.html](http://mndnr.gov/birds/woodpeckers.html)

### Woodpeckers in Minnesota

Woodpeckers are native birds that are more often heard than seen around homes in or near woodlands. Homeowners often consider them nuisances because of their noisy habits, but they have their place in the scheme of nature, eating insects that live under bark and in wood. Since some of these insects can damage wood, woodpeckers are occasionally an asset, acting as an early warning system to homeowners.

Enclosed please find information regarding control of woodpecker damage to buildings. No method is perfect—what is effective for one home owner may not work for another, so if one method is ineffective, try another. First, try to cover up or repair the previous damage the bird has caused. Holes made in your siding may attract other woodpeckers to the site to “check out” the potential food source. (Insect larvae located in the wood itself make chewing noises that the woodpeckers can hear).

### Damage

Woodpeckers peck at wood for several reasons: to make a nest or roost, to signal other woodpeckers, and to feed on insects under bark or in wood.

Woodpeckers often drill in dead and dying trees. However, for safety and aesthetic reasons, these trees are usually removed quickly from landscapes. Woodpeckers are very territorial, often returning to old sites to drill even though the trees are gone. With their preferred drilling sites removed, woodpeckers may begin drilling on houses, particularly those with cedar siding. They also commonly drill redwood siding (another soft wood), or wood that has been painted brown.

Drilling (or drumming) for nesting or roosting cavities creates large, deep holes in siding. Woodpeckers may excavate several different cavities before deciding which one to use. They often drill nests on buildings up high under ledges, usually in corners.

Male woodpeckers attract females and defend their territory by creating a loud, hollow-sounding noise, often by pecking on pipes. Both males and females drum, primarily in the spring. Such drumming may continue a few days to a month. This can occur on metal flashing, metal spouts, and television antennae, as well as wood and metal pipes.

When drilling creates rows of holes across the face of cedar siding, woodpeckers are feeding on leaf-cutting bees nesting in tunnels in the plywood. When cedar plywood siding is manufactured, the subsurface ply (crossband) is made from wood sheets which are not butted together. A tunnel is created when the cedar veneer is added. Bees gain entry to these tunnels either at the edge of the sheet or through openings created when the plywood

is grooved. Woodpeckers can hear and feel movement from bees in the tunnels, and peck through the cedar face to feed on them. On shingled siding, they most often drill through the thin end, just below the butt end of the overlapping shingle above.

## Control

Several tactics may be used to discourage woodpeckers from damaging your house. Plug and camouflage existing holes with rope caulk, silly putty, floral clay, or similar material. Be sure to seal tunnels used by leaf-cutting bees to exclude them.

Visual or sound repellents should be used as soon as possible before the birds' territories become well established. Visual repellents include plastic toy twirlers (whirligigs), windmills, hanging pie pans, hanging aluminum foil streamers 2 inches wide by 3 feet long, and Bird Scare reflecting tape.

Bird Scare Balloons – Place balloon in front of the affected wall or area. Leave the balloon up for about a week. Balloons are reusable and cost about \$13. They are available at larger garden centers, hardware stores and All Seasons Wild Bird Stores (seven locations in the metro).

Bird Scare Tape (also called Flash Tape, reflecting mylar tape). Tack and suspend several long streamers (6' to 8') above the affected surface about a foot apart. It is important that they move in the wind. Or arrange tape in horizontal rows over the affected area, suspending it away from the wall a bit, keeping it as taut as possible and twisted so both colors show. You may also try placing tall stakes or rods next to the wall and stringing the tape back and forth from stake to stake. The tapes costs about \$5 per roll and is available at larger garden centers, hardware stores, and bird feeding stores.

Fake Owls—Available at sporting goods/hunting supply stores. Place 10-15' high in visible spot, on edge of house roof, upper deck railing, etc. There are a few different types of plastic owls available, some of which have a mechanical head that moves and makes noise to scare birds away. These may negatively affect birds coming in to a backyard feeding station. The owls range in price from about \$12 - \$50.

Pie Tins and CDs—Attach pie tins or old, unusable CDs to a string, and hang in front of affected areas. Tins and discs should spin in the wind.

Linseed oil—Best for small pea-sized holes. Fill a hand-held oil can with linseed oil, an oil base for wood stains. Squirt a small amount of linseed oil in each opening. This kills the insects that are attracting the woodpeckers. Fill in hole with color-matched wood putty.

Wood Treatments - Cedar siding often attracts insects that woodpeckers are drilling to get at. Seal all openings in siding with caulking to keep insects to a minimum. Look for a wood stain or preservative that kills insects, which will deter the woodpeckers. Sticky anti-roosting treatments may also keep woodpeckers away.

Another option, especially if you are a bird enthusiast, is to provide an alternate drumming site away from houses. Attach two overlapping boards together and securely fasten the back board to a solid post, tree trunk, or other sturdy support. This provides a drumming site with pleasing resonance for the woodpeckers.

When woodpeckers are just drumming, chase them away. Cover or pad objects or areas being drummed, eliminate ledges or cracks used for footholds, apply a sticky substance, such as Tanglefoot® to a thin board and tack it where the bird would perch, and cover affected areas with plastic sheeting or netting. When covering

areas with netting, prop the net at least one inch away from the surface so the birds can't peck through it easily. Hardware cloth also works well.

Using suet as an alternative food to lure woodpeckers away from the house is a real gamble, but sometimes works. Suet is not a natural food for woodpeckers, but they may respond to it. However, it could backfire by attracting additional woodpeckers, especially in winter.

## Woodpecker Bongo

Lumber: Two 1" x 4" x 8' boards

*What in the world is a woodpecker bongo?* It is not a nest box, but a simple wooden structure to place on trees near houses where woodpeckers have been damaging cedar siding. The bongos provide Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers with a place to carry out their extended drumming sessions in the spring without causing damage on houses.

Woodpeckers need to peck on hollow trees in the spring to create a resonant sound to advertise and defend their nesting territories against other woodpeckers. This percussion solo can be extremely damaging to cedar siding on houses. By building and placing several of these simple bongos on trees around the yard, it will be so enticing to the woodpeckers that they will hopefully leave the house alone. This innovative idea was developed by Richard (Dick) Hjort of Chisago City, Minnesota. He said that the woodpeckers prefer pecking on the bongos to pecking on his house. He varies the length of his bongos (3, 3½ and 4 feet long) so that each bongo creates a different drumming pitch.

