

Some of the woodpeckers found in Kansas are: the Northern flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), a common year-round resident; the red-shafted flicker (*Colaptes cafer*), a more migratory bird found in Kansas in the winter; and the yellow-shafted flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) a common resident in eastern Kansas.

The hairy (*Picoides villosus*) and downy (*Picoides pubescens*) woodpeckers are similar in appearance and are the smallest woodpeckers found year-round in Kansas. They are mostly black and white in color.

The red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) is generally a summer resident in Kansas; however some of these birds might overwinter in the state.

The red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) is a year-round resident.

The largest woodpecker found in Kansas is the crow-sized, pileated woodpecker, (*Dryocopus pileatus*) which generally lives only in mature timber in river bottoms along the eastern edge of the state.

Three different kinds of sapsuckers are found in Kansas. The Williamson sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) has been recorded as being seen in the state only on rare occasions. The yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) is a low-density winter resident throughout Kansas. These birds generally arrive in October and leave by late April. The red-naped sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) is found occasionally in extreme western Kansas.

One woodpecker, the ladder-backed woodpecker (*Picoides scoloris*), occurs in a very limited area in southwest Kansas.

And the least known woodpecker in Kansas is the Lewis woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), which occasionally strays into Kansas from the west.

There are more than 200 different kinds of woodpeckers in the world,

some 45 of which are in the United States. Kansas has 13 different kinds of woodpeckers. Woodpeckers prefer habitat in the form of mature and old woodlands where there are standing dead trees or large dead limbs in older living trees.

### Biology and Habits

The bills of woodpeckers are straight, sturdy and sharp pointed and are used to chisel through or under the bark in search of wood-burrowing insect grubs, spiders and ants. The woodpeckers also use their bills to chisel out their nesting cavities as well as night roosting cavities.

Woodpeckers have special adaptations in their tongues that enable them to capture and eat insects. Sapsuckers, which are true woodpeckers, eat sap they obtain by pecking rows of small holes through the bark of live trees. Small brushlike bristles on their tongues lap up the insects attracted to the sap as well as lapping up the sap itself.

The tail and feet hold the bird firmly anchored to the tree trunk. Strong neck muscles provide the force necessary to drill holes, and special bristly feathers around their nostrils filter out the wood dust as the woodpeckers chisel away.

### Urban Problems

Woodpecker damage to houses is an extensive problem. In one study, 43 percent of those people reporting

damage knew of other people who also had similar damage. The majority of people experiencing woodpecker damage lived in a woods or within half a mile of a woods, 95 percent of which contained large hardwood trees. This may not reflect a woodpecker preference for houses, but rather may reflect a disruption of habitat.

There is a high incidence of damage to cedar. It may reflect woodpecker selection, but it also may reflect a selection of cedar as a building material in wooded areas.

Woodpecker damage is most likely to occur in spring and fall, but spring is the biggest damage season. No one really knows why the birds are attracted to houses, but natural wood (especially cedar) siding, large size, and better sound production may make houses seem like "super trees."

The key to successful control is to take action as soon as a woodpecker shows signs of becoming a pest. If it is allowed to establish its behavior pattern, it will become much more difficult to stop.

Woodpecker damage to houses is not a new occurrence. In fact, it is becoming

### Urban Wildlife Damage Control

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ing very common in suburban environments, which are spreading into wooded ecosystems. At the same time, the older suburbs and the residential areas in the larger cities are heading toward their ecological climax.

Trees planted 30 or more years ago are becoming more suitable as habitat for woodpeckers. Woodpeckers seem to be attracted to the cedar siding for three reasons: food, nesting and “drumming.”

### Drumming

Woodpeckers are unique in the animal world in that they are the only creatures—besides humans—to be true instrumentalists. No other known bird, mammal or insect, instinctively makes a sound with something other than a part of its body.

Woodpeckers make their noise on a number of objects, including trees, branches, drain sprouts, street lights, TV antennas, silos or anything else that resonates loudly.

Woodpeckers drum for several reasons. First, it is a territorial signal, similar to most other birds’ singing. It also may serve to attract a mate. Because of this, drumming activity is at its highest in spring, although fall drumming is not uncommon.

It also is thought that some drumming may be used to locate food. The birds tap on a tree and then listen for any movement of insects inside. This saves the bird the effort of drilling into countless trees only to find them empty.

They know to drill only when they hear some sort of sound inside. In a similar manner, they will tap on potential nest trees to find the one most suitable.

The kinds of woodpeckers most often involved in urban damage include yellow-shafted flicker, red-bellied, downy, red-headed and hairy.

The most damage from woodpeckers in Kansas occurs in suburban and urban areas; not much occurs in rural areas.

Kansas residents report these kinds of problems: drumming on gutter-

ing, metal flashing, downspouts, TV antenna, columns and siding.

### Laws and Regulations

Woodpeckers are federally protected migratory species, and as such are subject to both state and federal laws. The legal requirements under each set of laws apply. A federally issued depredation permit is required before any person may take, possess or transport migratory birds for depredation control purposes. No permit is required to scare or herd depredating migratory birds other than federally listed threatened or endangered species, bald or golden eagles (50 CFR 21.41).

For information on these and other state and federal permit conditions, contact Wildlife Damage Control, 131 Call Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506. Permit requests should be addressed to the USFWS, P.O. Box 25486, DFC (60130), Denver, CO 80225-0486, (303) 236-8171.

### Problem Management

One thing that cannot be over-emphasized is to start doing something to stop the drumming as soon as it begins. In cases where people wait until the pattern of drumming has been established, it is difficult to break the habit.

Study the place where the drumming is taking place. In order to drum, the woodpecker must be able to hold onto the structure. Therefore, first consider removing all ledges, cracks and crevices that might serve as toeholds. This may solve the problem.

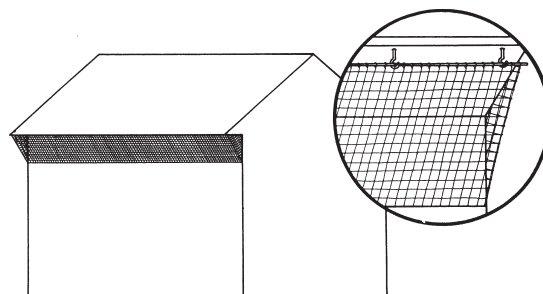
When damage is such that specific control is necessary, a variety of measures can be applied (*Figure 1*). All species of woodpeckers can be controlled in similar ways, though individual birds may react differently.

It may be possible to deaden or dull the sound with padding by placing insulation or other material behind the siding at the place where the drumming is occurring. If necessary, remove a plank or two to insert material and then replace. This technique is most effective as soon as drumming begins.

### Visual Repellents

Using visual repellents may also chase the birds away (*Figure 2*, page 3). The three most used most are aluminum foil strips, hand-held windmills, falcon silhouette mobiles and magnifying mirrors.

- Aluminum foil strips:
  - Cut several strips 2- to 3-inches across and 2- to 3-feet long.
  - Attach a 6-inch string to one end of each strip.
  - Partially hammer in small brads or nails 2- to 3-feet above the drumming site; space 6- to 10-feet apart.
  - Attach each string to a nail in so that strips hang freely and move with every breeze. It is the motion which frightens birds away.
- Hand-held windmills:
  - If available, purchase windmills whose vanes are reflective.
  - Attach at the drumming site with



*Figure 1. To discourage woodpeckers. Plastic netting attached from outside edge of eave, angled to siding. Insert shows hooks and wooden dowels to attach.*

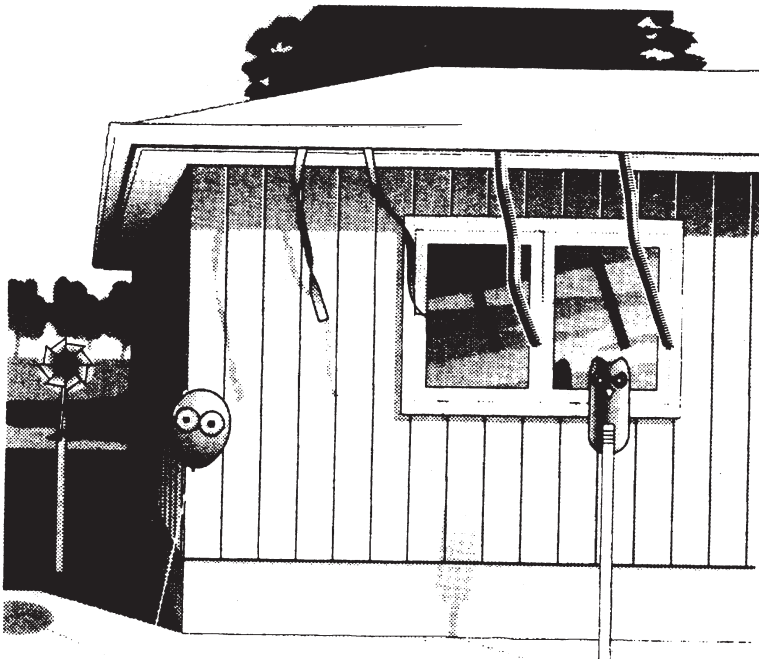


Figure 2. Common scare tactics used to discourage woodpeckers: pinwheels, balloons with eyes painted on, foil strips and models of owls.

brads, nails, pins, small staples or tape.

- Be certain revolving vanes are moving freely. If necessary, put backing behind stick to free pivot.

■ Falcon silhouette mobile:

- Use the design in Figure 3, page 4 to draw an enlarged outline of a falcon in flight (falcons are referred as bird hawks and all birds fear these falcons).
- Color your falcon outline solid black; after you have colored the outline cut out the falcon silhouette.
- Use 1/4-inch stiff backing, the same size and shape and glue it to the falcon outlined cutout.
- Attach a 12-inch monofilament line to an 18-inch long 1/4-inch dowel rod and attach a fishing swivel to the falcon silhouette at the beak. Tie one end of the line to the swivel and the other end of the line to the end of the dowel rod.
- Attach the opposite end of the

dowel rod to a 1/2-inch pine block 5 inches square by drilling a hole into the block.

- Attach the block to the siding above the drumming site.
  - Move the location of the silhouette daily so that the drumming woodpecker will not become used to the silhouette and no longer see it as a threat.
  - Two silhouettes used at one drumming site sometimes gives better results.
  - These silhouettes are helpful in reducing other bird problems, such as songbirds flying into plate glass windows and keeping birds out of individual fruit trees and are worth trying in other cases.
- Magnifying mirrors:
- Attach a round shaving mirror to the siding near the drumming site. When the woodpecker sees itself, often this will scare the woodpecker away.

Sound also can be used to harass

offending woodpeckers. Noise, such as from banging pans, boards, clapping hands or cap pistols will chase birds away.

Rubber balloons with round owl-like eyes attached or painted on the surfaces and hung in the drumming area have been used successfully.

Holes pecked in the siding may be round and smooth or vertical, rough gashes 1 to several inches long. This kind of damage may be restricted to a small area, often high on the corner of the building, or it may be extensive. The large round holes are probably intended to be nesting or roosting cavities. Extensive damage back and forth across the siding may result from a search for insect food behind the siding.

Try these solutions:

- placing a loud-playing radio in a window to scare the birds away.
- stapling polypropylene netting or screen wire near the rain gutter and angling it down to the house to close off an area to woodpeckers.
- locating nest boxes or suet in trees near the home to lure the birds away.

To stop pecking on windows and molding, pull down the shades or blinds or block the bird's reflection with cardboard.

Eliminate foods that attract woodpeckers to or near buildings, such as insects behind or between shingles or suet at bird feeders. Dead trees may also harbor insects that attract woodpeckers. Cutting such trees down, however, may deprive woodpeckers of drumming, nesting or food storage sites and force them to use a building instead. Deciding what to do depends upon the individual problem.

Fall damage often results from woodpeckers searching for food in or under the siding, usually for insects or insect larvae. Certain types of plywood siding contain tunnels that are opened when the plywood is grooved (Figure 4, page 4). Insects, especially leaf-cutting bees, enter these tunnels for winter shelter or to lay eggs.

If woodpecker holes are arranged in neat, regular rows, insects inside such tunnels are probably attracting the woodpeckers. If insects in the siding seem to be the cause, you can eliminate that attraction by removing the insects. Caulk all the tunnels in the siding, insecticides or wood preservatives may help in some situations, although it is usually difficult to get an insecticide into the siding where it will kill the insects.

Treatment of the siding with pentachlorophenol or other toxic wood preservatives also seems to repel woodpeckers as well as providing insecticidal and wood care benefits. Check with your paint dealer about incorporating a wood preservative with a coat of stain. There have been reports that pentachlorophenol fumes penetrate siding. To avoid such insect and woodpecker problems, you might consider using a different type of siding in a wooded area.

### Repellents

Sticky, paste-type repellents applied in the damaged area and for several

feet on either side have been effective for some problems.

Since these repellents may stain, they should be applied on masking tape and not directly on the wood surface. These repellents may melt and run in hot weather and streak building sides.

Areas of concentrated damage can be temporarily screened with poultry wire, hardware cloth, plastic sheets or netting. Surfaces that are damaged repeatedly may have to be permanently protected with metal sheeting.

### Taste

Many chemicals, such as Ro-pel® and Thiram®, which have objectionable tastes as well as odors have been tested for treating utility poles and fence posts to discourage woodpeckers.

### Tactile

Sticky or tacky bird repellents such as Tanglefoot®, Bird Stop®, Roost-No-More®, etc., smeared on limbs or trunks where sapsuckers are working often will discourage the birds

from high value orchard, park or yard shade trees.

These same types of repellents also can be effective in discouraging the birds if applied to wood siding and other areas with structural damage. The birds are not entrapped by the sticky substances but dislike the tacky footing.

A word of caution: some of the sticky bird repellents will discolor painted, stained or natural wood siding. Others may run in warm weather, leaving unsightly streaks. It is best to try out the material on a small out-of-sight area first before an extensive application. The tacky repellents can be applied to a thin piece of pressed board, which is then fastened to the area where damage is occurring.

Many birdwatchers in the Midwest and East put out beef suet, particularly in winter, to attract woodpeckers. Placing suet stations near damaged buildings has been recommended to entice birds away from the building or damaged area.

This apparently works in some instances; but since much of the

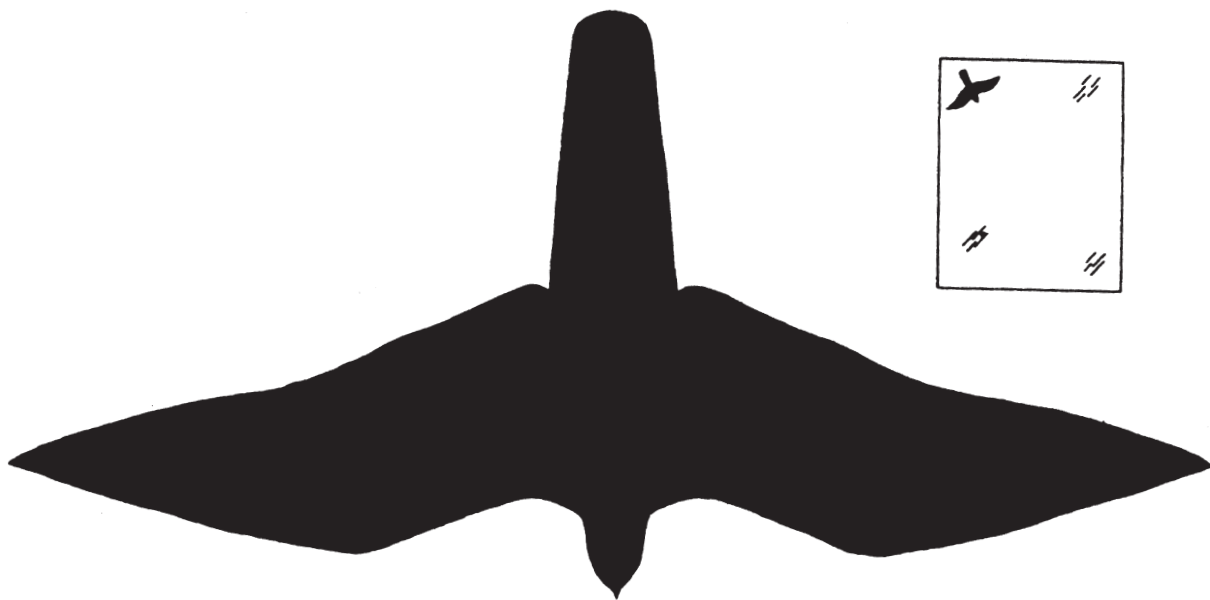


Figure 3. Falcon silhouette may be enlarged and cutout.

damage is totally unrelated to feeding behavior, it is difficult to explain why it sometimes works. Possibly it simply provides an attractive time-consuming alternative activity. Suet, when offered in the warmer seasons of the year, may be potentially harmful to woodpeckers. Besides making the bird dependent on handouts, the suet reportedly gets onto the feathers of the head and may lead to matting and eventual loss of feathers.

You should consider the needs of birds like woodpeckers as you plan your yard and trees. In most cases you could reduce house damage by allowing large dead limbs to remain on trees, providing a place for the woodpeckers to nest and find food. Also, nest boxes could be installed in trees to give woodpeckers an alternative site for nesting.

Building an alternate drumming site may reduce the amount of damage to the house. Fasten a cedar board securely to the pecking site and attach a second board loosely to one end of the first board. These two boards should overlap to form a flexible resonating surface. A simple hollow box also may serve as an effective substitute.

Utility poles can be covered with hardware cloth to prevent woodpecker damage. There are no repellents that serve this purpose.

Sapsuckers are specialized woodpeckers that excavate numerous rows of squarish holes around the circumference of the boles and larger limbs of many species of trees and shrubs, including evergreens. Sap flows into these pits, and the sapsuckers lick it up with their brush-tipped tongues and eat insects attracted to the exudation. Individual trees are attacked year after year, suffer from lowered vitality and are exposed to injury by insects and disease. Occasionally, a tree is completely girdled and dies. Damage most often occurs to ornamental yard trees, but in the wintering areas and during migration, sapsuckers sometimes congregate in orchards and cause significant damage. The yellow-bellied sapsucker, as its name implies, drills

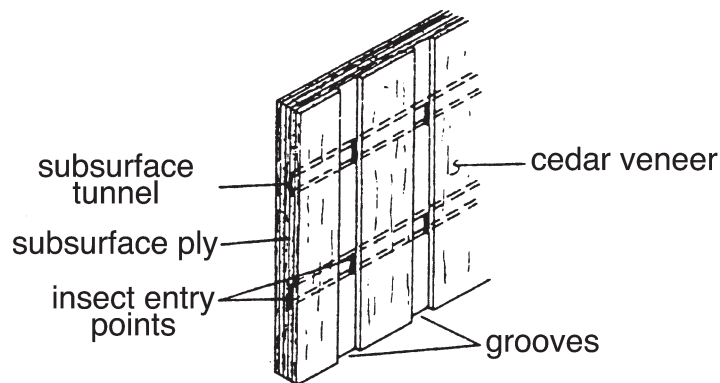


Figure 4. Grooved plywood siding allows insects to burrow their way in.

into trees to obtain sap. Orchard trees and a number of ornamentals may be damaged. An individual sapsucker often picks a favorite tree and visits it repeatedly. Sapsucker damage can cause unsightly wounds to the tree and result in disease and insect problems.

Individual trees are best protected by draping plastic or nylon netting over the entire tree or by placing loose cylinders of hardware cloth around trunks and limbs. Since migrating or wintering sapsuckers cause much of the damage, the period these barriers are needed is seasonal and often of short duration.

Sapsucker damage is less serious than home damage caused by other species, and it is easier to deal with. To prevent it, wrap the damaged part of the tree with burlap or hardware cloth, or smear a sticky repellent such as "bird tangle-foot" on the trunk. Be careful with bird tanglefoot; other birds not responsible for the damage can get stuck in it.

If nonlethal methods fail, it may be necessary to kill the birds (**see Laws and Regulations**). When a federal permit is granted, it allows woodpeckers to be shot and may allow them to be trapped provided the federal permit **specifically** authorizes trapping.

Nailing wooden-based mouse or rat snaptraps adjacent to the damaged area may be useful. Be sure to check traps often, and dispose of the dead birds properly.

**When using traps, make sure they are out of reach of children and pets.**

Shooting the offending bird with a slingshot, air gun or BB gun may also be useful.

Check with local police authorities on the use of firearms in your area whether urban, rural town or field.

Lethal control may not be totally effective in some cases, as new birds may move into the space vacated by the dead ones.

For more information contact Wildlife Damage Control, Call Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506-1600. (785) 532-5734.

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**Wildlife Specialist**

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