

Solving Problems with Woodpeckers



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Woodpeckers are among the most recognizable and delightful of feathered friends to grace our yards and gardens. In late summer and fall, they may fill the air with the busy sounds

of winter preparations, as they bore out roosting cavities. And their distinctive drumming—a territorial signal—is one of the true heralds of spring.

Unfortunately, all of this activity often happens on the wood siding of houses, which creates headaches—often literally!—for homeowners. In urban and suburban areas, the industrious activities of woodpeckers can quickly escalate into conflicts with people when they choose to feed, drum, or excavate cavities on wood-sided buildings.

Make no mistake: Woodpeckers can be persistent. Understandably, some people are driven to distraction when that familiar *rat-a-tat* hammering emanates from the side of their house in the early morning hours, or look on as their wooden siding is drilled with holes. Woodpeckers have even famously delayed the launch of a space shuttle. In 1995, a pair of these birds drilled almost 200 holes into the foam insulation of the shuttle Discovery's external tank, causing it to be rolled back from the launch pad for repairs.

While the environmental benefits and enjoyment we derive from this bird certainly outweigh any damage or inconvenience they may cause, the key to humanely and effectively resolving problems with woodpeckers is to recognize activity early and act promptly. Some simple harassment techniques can effectively encourage woodpeckers to move on.

Problems with woodpeckers are most likely to occur in the spring, during the mating and nesting season. Many species rhythmically drum on resonating objects with their beaks as a territorial advertisement, similar to birdsong. Occasionally, drumming "stations" are set up on utility poles, gutters, chimney caps, and other resonant places on buildings. Drumming is typically concentrated in one area of the building and occurs persistently. Damage generally consists of shallow, clustered pock marks or dents rather than the deeper holes associated with feeding and nesting. While wood is naturally more prone to showing damage than aluminum siding, the sound of drumming tends to be more annoying than visibly damaging.



Woodpeckers also excavate cavities for nesting, roosting, and, in some species, for food storage. These holes will be round and deep—some species may drill as far as two feet into trees—about 1–2 inches in diameter, and often occur in loose knots in the siding. They may be surrounded by half-finished holes—woodpeckers often start one hole then abandon it to start another. Feeding, however, can cause extensive damage to the exterior of buildings. Once they have established a feeding pattern on a house, woodpeckers can be relentless. While this may be one of the more difficult problems to control, several strategies have been successful.

Above all, maintain the exteriors of wooden houses and keep insect infestations at bay. Also, secure loose boards or use filling behind those that do sound hollow, to discourage woodpecker drumming. To encourage problem birds to move on, exclusion techniques are usually all that are needed. Smaller boards and chimney caps may be covered with cloth or foam rubber padding until the habit is broken (take care not to cover the cap completely). You can also try hanging netting, plastic sheeting, or screen from the eaves and suspend it several inches from the affected wall to prevent access.

Remember that a bird building a nest or roosting cavity is just passing through a seasonal behavior pattern. If nesting in the side of a building can be discouraged within a few days or weeks, the bird will probably look elsewhere for a more hospitable location. Therefore, a combination of prompt repair of the damage and scare tactics usually works. Fill shallow holes with caulking or wood filler, and larger holes (make sure no birds are inside) with wooden plugs or wadded window screen, then caulk. Mesh hardware cloth or welded wire can be used to cover damaged areas and protect them from further damage.

A number of devices are known to be effective against drumming and feeding woodpeckers. Try the least expensive alternatives first, such as hanging aluminum pans, plastic streamers, wind chimes, or Mylar® party balloons. Strips of aluminum foil or scare tape hung loosely from the eaves so that they flutter in the wind may also frighten an offending bird off. Apply tear-resistant tape (like duct tape) to each end; nail one end of each strip to the outer edge of the roof soffit, just under the gutter. Attach the other end to the side of the house, longitudinally. Before attaching this end, twist the strip several times, pull it downward until taut, then let out about ¼ inch of slack. This will produce a shimmering effect as the foil or tape flutters in the wind.

Harassment tactics, such as shouting, clapping, or banging on a pot are also worth trying. Simply opening a nearby window or door and making some noise may successfully scare away a woodpecker. Keep in mind that persistency, and consistency, are necessary to dissuade woodpeckers from causing damage.



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 [Woodpeckers](#)

