

THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“Woodpeckers”

by HSV Audubon

Woodpeckers are common birds in the Village. All seven of our woodpecker species share unique characteristics. Each has a strong, “chisel-like” bill and a skull reinforced for pounding holes in trees. Once a hole is chiseled they use their long, sticky tongue to capture bugs and insect larvae. All woodpeckers nest in cavities, usually in a hole they have made or remodeled. Their two in front and two in back toe structure (most other birds have three toes in front and one in back) and stiff tail feathers are perfectly suited for climbing up or down the side of a tree trunk.

Identifying Village woodpeckers is fairly easy with one exception. The large crow sized Pileated with its loud “Woody Woodpecker” call, black body and brilliant red crest is the easiest to identify. Adult Red-headed Woodpeckers are about half the size of the Pileated. Their bright, all red head looks too big for their two-tone black and white body. Northern Flickers are mostly a brownish color. Identify them by their V-shaped black bib and white rump spot seen when flying. The Flicker is also the only woodpecker that spends much time on the ground while searching for food. The most common woodpecker in the Village, the Red-bellied, has a striated black and white back with a brown breast and flank. The most telling Red-bellied ID characteristic is a bright red patch on the back/top of the head. The trickiest woodpecker identification is telling a Downy from a Hairy because their coloring is identical. Although the Hairy is noticeably larger if you can see them together, size is not easy to judge when they are isolated. The best indicator is the length of the bill compared to the length of the head. They are equal with the Downy; whereas, the Hairy’s bill will be noticeably longer. Downys are more numerous by far in the Village. Our remaining woodpecker species, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is a migrant who is only here in the colder months. It might best be described as looking like a chubby Hairy who has been playing in soot. A white crescent seen when their wings are folded is also diagnostic for the Sapsucker. Sapsuckers also are the only Village woodpecker with a red patch both on its head and throat. Female/male differentiation of all Village woodpeckers usually depends on the amount of red on their heads with males having more.

Woodpeckers (Flickers to a lesser extent) will come to log or suet feeders. The Red-bellied and Downy/Hairys will use seed and peanut feeders, too.

As always HSVBIRDS.ORG has a lot of information about everything you’d like to know about birds and some of Nature’s other wonders. Check-out our Village birding checklist that includes over 200 species of birds that might be seen in the Village, when they might be seen and how common they are. It’s a great way to keep track of the birds at your feeder.

HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except in the summer, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome to join us in our love and pursuit of birds and all things Nature.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky