

Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are considered a “keystone” species because many other animals in the forest depend on their activities. They provide a critical ecosystem function by creating tree cavities that are used by a spectrum of forest creatures — including Chickadees and Nuthatches. Their work contributes to the overall health and balance of our natural areas, which is one reason why woodpeckers are protected by law.

In late winter or early spring, you may hear woodpeckers more than usual because they are establishing nesting territory and looking for a “date or mate.” They can’t sing like other birds, so they communicate by “drumming” on loud surfaces, which can include gutters, downspouts, flashing, and other metal or resonant surfaces. This is usually harmless “showing off.”

However, woodpeckers also drill for food on trees, stumps, and wood surfaces. If you happen to hear them drilling on the wood siding of your home, you might want to have your home checked for insects. If you solve your insect problem, you solve the problem of woodpeckers looking for food on your home.



Northern Flicker

Other strategies for discouraging woodpeckers from drumming or drilling in the wrong location include:

- Use noise-making tactics, such as clapping your hands or banging garbage can lids together.
- Providing suet away from the pecking area as an alternative food source, but hang it out of the direct sun.
- Hang windsocks, mylar tape, colorful streamers, or hawk silhouettes in the vicinity of the drilling.
- Cover the affected area with woodpecker proof material such as 1/4-inch hardware cloth, netting or plastic.
- Owl decoys may be effective.
- Hang a lightweight plastic mesh netting at least 3 inches from affected wood areas.
- Provide an alternative drumming site. Nail two boards together at just one end (producing resonation) and hang on a secure surface.

We are lucky to have woodpeckers in Mt. Park, which is a sign that “nature’s neighborhood” is healthy. If they are feeding or drumming in the wrong location, please try the strategies above to help them move to a more appropriate location.



Pileated Woodpecker