

ADDRESSING WOODPECKER PROBLEMS IN MONTANA

Although they fill a valuable niche in our forests, several species of woodpeckers can cause damage to buildings.

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Thirteen species of woodpeckers inhabit Montana, with the downy and hairy woodpeckers and the northern flickers being the most widespread. Woodpeckers are a federally protected bird under the North American Migratory Bird Act. Be sure to contact your local wildlife warden before implementing control measures. Before authorities will allow lethal control of woodpeckers, it must be shown that non-lethal methods have been tried.

Woodpeckers usually make their presence known through their noisy hammering. In some cases the woodpeckers may be hammering to get at insects under siding or under the bark of trees. This may indicate it is also important to address the insect problem. Some plywood-type sidings are manufactured in a way that leaves hollow spots under the surface. When a woodpecker taps the surface, the hollow spot falsely indicates there is an insect under the surface. In these cases, the woodpecker makes holes in the siding while seeking an imaginary insect.

At certain times woodpeckers just want to make noise. Their hammering serves as a warning to other woodpeckers that a territory is occupied. In such cases, the birds may hammer on metal poles, metal siding, or other surfaces that provide loud, enhanced acoustics.

Various strategies are available to address woodpecker damage. Success will be most likely if methods to address the problem are implemented as soon as possible. It is also important to try several methods. Each situation is different and persistence will be important to solve some woodpecker problems.

Exclusion: Several exclusion methods are available. One of the most effective methods of excluding woodpeckers from damaging wood siding beneath the eaves is to place lightweight plastic bird-type netting over the area. The netting can be

attached to the overhanging eaves and angled back to the siding below the damaged area and tightly secured. Because the net is extended away from the house wall, the woodpecker can't get close enough to damage the wood. Some homeowners leave the hooks up year round and then hang the netting as needed.

Placing metal sheeting over a pecked area on building siding may offer protection from continued damage. These metal barriers work best if installed as soon as damage begins. Occasionally, the birds will move over to an unprotected spot and the protected area must be expanded. Aluminum flashing is easy to work with to cover damaged sites. Metal sheathing can be disguised with paint or simulated wood grain to match the siding.

Frightening: Some frightening devices will work, but only for a short time. Fake hawks, owls, snakes, and cats are generally considered ineffective as repellents. Plastic twirlers, windmills, aluminum foil, plastic strips, bright tin lids, and pie pans have been used with some success especially if put in place soon after the damage starts. Stretching reflective mylar tape strips across a damaged area or letting them hang down is an alternative to aluminum strips. Large rubber balloons with owl-like eyes painted on them will also work for a short time.

Woodpeckers can be very persistent and are not easily driven from their territories or selected pecking sites. For this reason, visual or sound types of frightening devices for protecting buildings should be employed as soon as the problem is identified and before territories are well established.

There are claims that high-frequency and sound-producing devices, as well as taste and odor repellents are objectionable to woodpeckers. However, research tests have not shown them to be effective.

Some motion-activated water sprayers have been developed that spray woodpeckers when they break the motion detecting barriers. These work well because they activate only when the bird is in close proximity, which prevents the birds from becoming accustomed to the scare device. Positioning the device on the side of a house or near trees may take some creativity, but the results may be worth the effort.

A less sophisticated method involves setting up a garden hose aimed at the area the woodpecker is damaging. When the woodpecker is heard drumming, turn on the hose. It only takes a few squirts. They leave quickly and don't like hanging on to wet surfaces.

Beating on tin sheets or barrels with clubs also scares woodpeckers away. Loud noises such as hand-clapping, a toy cap pistol, and banging on a garbage can lid have been used to frighten woodpeckers away. Such harassment, if repeated when the bird returns, may cause it to leave for good.

Remember, a combination of several frightening techniques used together works better than a single technique used alone. Vary the location, intensity, and types of scare devices to increase their effectiveness. Also remember to begin early before birds form a strong attachment to the site, and be persistent until the problem is solved.

In some situations, sticky or tacky bird repellents such as Tanglefoot®, 4-The-Birds®, and Roost-No-More®, placed in bands with a caulking gun can be effective in discouraging woodpeckers if applied to wood siding and other areas of structural damage. The birds are not entrapped by the sticky

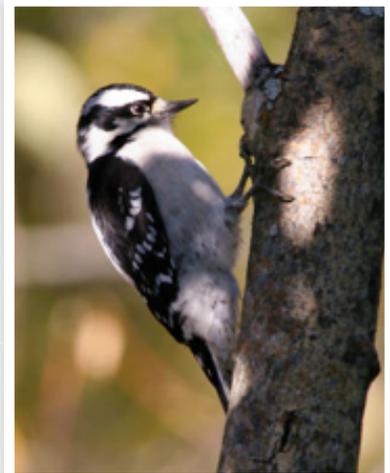
substances but rather dislike the tacky footing. Some of the sticky bird repellents will discolor painted, stained, or natural wood siding. Others may run in warm weather, leaving unsightly streaks. To avoid discoloration, tacky repellents can be applied to a thin piece of pressed board which is then fastened to the area where damage is occurring.

Toxicants: There are no toxicants registered for woodpecker control.

Lethal Removal: In some situations, where property damage is severe and non-lethal methods have been unsuccessful, it may be necessary to employ lethal methods to stop the woodpecker causing the damage. After federal and state permits are obtained, wooden-base rat snap traps can be effective in killing the offending birds. The trap is nailed to the building with the trigger downward alongside the spot sustaining the damage. The pan or trigger is expanded with a piece of cardboard and is baited with nut meats (walnuts, almonds, or pecans) or suet. If multiple areas are being damaged, several traps can be used.

Shooting is an effective method of removing the offending woodpecker provided safety and legal concerns are addressed. Understand that many communities consider pellet rifles to be firearms. Follow all firearm regulations in your area.

Once the woodpeckers have been discouraged, frightened away, or killed, damaged spots on buildings should be repaired by filling in the holes with wood patch or covering them. This will help to prevent future attacks from woodpeckers on damaged sites in the future. ■



The northern flicker, hairy woodpecker, and downy woodpecker are widespread across Montana.