

Dealing with Woodpecker Damage to Houses

Woodpeckers are among the most recognized birds and are interesting to watch. They are beneficial to our natural environment, but they become a nuisance when they damage houses.

Woodpeckers have a strong, pointed bill, used for chipping and digging into tree trunks for wood-boring insects. They nest in cavities that they chisel deep into a large branch or tree. Several species of woodpeckers are found in Nebraska, including hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, red-headed woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker and the northern flicker. The yellow-bellied sapsucker overwinters in southeastern Nebraska, but is relatively uncommon.

Damage results when woodpeckers "hammer" on houses, peck holes in search of insect food or excavate a roosting or breeding cavity. In forested areas, these activities are on trees. A high percentage of homes damaged by woodpeckers have natural cedar siding. To a woodpecker, the natural cedar siding and the size of the house make these houses seem like a "super tree", a huge tree that has no bark.



Woodpecker damage due to foraging for carpenter bee larva on fascia boards of a house.

the major sources of insects that woodpeckers use for food. Wood in utility poles, fence posts, wood siding is also recognized by woodpeckers as a source of insects, especially if insects hide in cracks in the wood.

Nesting/Roosting

Woodpeckers that use a building for feeding and drumming sometimes drill a hole in an attempt to excavate a winter roost or nesting cavity. Woodpeckers will hammer completely through the siding and may attempt another nesting hole until the bird finds a suitable location.

Control

The key to successful woodpecker control is to take action as soon as you notice the bird damaging the house to stop the behavior before it becomes a habit.

If the woodpecker seems to be searching for insects, you can take actions to control the insects. Caulk tunnels and other openings in the siding. Insecticides or wood preservatives may help in some situations, although getting an insecticide into the siding where it will kill insects may be difficult. If the woodpecker is drumming, eliminate ledges or the cracks the bird uses for a foot-hold.

Attach visual scare devices such as strips of aluminum foil, scare-eye balloons or a child's hand-held windmill to the area of the house where the bird most often hammers. A shaving mirror with the large-image side toward the woodpecker has been effective, apparently because the mirror reflects the image of a larger woodpecker. Plastic owls and snakes may also work to

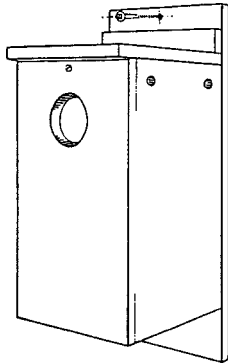
scare woodpeckers. You will have to move visual scare devices regularly to keep the woodpeckers from getting used to them.

If the bird drums on only one or a few locations on the house, either deaden those spots to muffle the noise as much as possible or cover them with a piece of sheet metal, hardware cloth or hang plastic bird netting four or five inches from the house to keep the bird away. If it seems to be trying to excavate a cavity, try putting a suitable nest box high on the house and maybe another

one high in a nearby tree. To make your own nest box, refer to UNL Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County Educational Resource (024-99), "Build a Nest Box to Attract Birds," available at the Lancaster County Extension office.

If your house has natural cedar siding, use a water sealer to seal the small holes; the wood can then be painted. Some homeowners report painting their house helps reduce woodpecker damage.

Woodpeckers are migratory, non-game birds protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. This means killing birds or destroying eggs is against federal and/or state laws. Killing birds can only be done with a permit obtained by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. To find out how to obtain a control permit, contact the Game and Parks Commission at 471-0641. (BPO)



Damage due to woodpecker foraging for insects on cedar shingles.

Drumming

During courtship activities in the spring, male woodpeckers advertise their territory by "drumming", repeatedly hammering on the side of an object, like a dead tree or limb. Unfortunately, woodpeckers sometimes choose man-made objects that amplify the sound, such as wood siding, rain gutters and downspouts.

Feeding

Wood from trees is one of

Is Mold a Problem in Your Home?

The question many have is what causes mold. The key to mold control is moisture control. This time of year homes with high humidity and low air circulation may find mold problems in basements, around windows and in closets with outside walls. To prevent damage in your home and with the furnishings as well as avoiding health problems, it's important to control moisture. This will also eliminate mold growth.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggests places that are often or always damp can be hard to maintain completely free of mold. If there's mold in the shower or elsewhere in the bathroom that seems to reappear, increasing the ventilation (running a fan or opening a window) and cleaning more frequently will usually prevent mold from recurring or at least keep the mold to a minimum.

The most important thing to

do when dealing with mold in a home is to find the source of the moisture causing the problem. After finding the problem, make the necessary repairs and then clean up the area. Areas that are porous such as wallboard, carpets and fabric items may be difficult to clean and have to be replaced. To clean a hard surface area, scrub mold off the hard surfaces with a detergent and water. Dry completely, then treat with a chlorine bleach

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Beginning Beekeeping Workshop

Conducted by

Dr. Marion Ellis, UNL Extension Apiary Specialist
Nick Aliano, UNL Graduate Assistant
and Barb Ogg, UNL Extension Educator



March 22 and 23, 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Lancaster Extension Education Center

April 3, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Optional apiculture lab, Agricultural Research and Development Center, near Mead

Interested in a new hobby that gets you outdoors and is fun and interesting, too? Learn from experts the basics of beekeeping in two, three-hour evening sessions. At the two evening sessions, you will learn about bee biology and behavior, colony location, the most common honey-producing plants and bee diseases successful beekeepers need to know. Participants will be able to order protective equipment and hive kits.

On April 3, participants are invited to the University of Nebraska Apiculture Laboratory at Mead, Nebraska to assemble hives, learn about processing honey and be able to examine hives. Members of the Nebraska Beekeeper's Association will be on-hand to share their knowledge with you.

Cost: \$15 (includes reference materials)

Register by calling the Lancaster County Extension Office at 441-7180.

For more information call Barb Ogg at 441-7180.

Drinking Water Q&A

Q. How do I know what is in my drinking water?

A. The Federal Safe Drinking Water Act requires communities to tell water consumers the source of drinking water and potential health effects if there are contaminants present. The Lincoln Water System prides itself in providing citizens of Lincoln exceptionally high quality water. Check out the report on their Web site: www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/pworks/water/safewtr.pdf

However, testing private water supplies is not required by current regulations. Owners of private water supplies are responsible to themselves for having their water supply tested to ensure it is safe.

Q. Can I tell if my drinking water is OK by looking at it, tasting it or smelling it?

A. No. In many cases, chemicals or microbes could make water unsafe to drink cannot be seen, tasted or smelled. The only way to know if water you use for drinking and cooking contains potentially harmful substances is for it to be tested. All Nebraska public water supplies are required by federal and state laws to be tested on a scheduled basis for potentially harmful contamination.

Q. Water often looks cloudy when first taken from a faucet and then it clears up. Why does this happen and is the water safe to drink?

A. The cloudy water is caused by tiny air bubbles in the water. After a while, the bubbles rise to the top and are gone. The air bubbles do not make the water unsafe to drink.

Water fact: Almost 80 percent of the earth's surface is covered with water; but less than one percent is fresh water that can actually be used for drinking, irrigating crops, recreation, industrial uses and other purposes. Ninety-nine percent of the earth's water is in oceans or frozen in polar ice caps. That's why it is very important we conserve and protect our fresh water supplies.

Source: Sharon Skipton, extension educator, Douglas/Sarpy Counties. (BPO)