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Prevention and control of woodpecker damage

George E. Graves and William F. Andelt¹

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Quick Facts

The common flicker, which is responsible for most woodpecker damage to Colorado homes, can be identified in flight by a yellow or reddish tint under the wing and tail feathers.

Woodpeckers can cause an annoyance by hammering or "drumming" on houses and property damage by drilling holes in wood siding and eaves.

Damage can be controlled by exclusion, scare devices and preventive construction.

Woodpeckers, *Picidae*, are 7 to 15 inches long, have short legs, sharp-clawed toes and a stiff tail. Most woodpeckers feed on wood-boring insects, insects on trees and the ground, vegetable matter, berries or tree sap.

The common flicker, which is responsible for most woodpecker damage to Colorado homes, can be identified in flight by a yellow or reddish tint under the wing and tail feathers. Flickers have black spots on a tanish-white breast and belly. Males have a black or red "mustache" extending from the gape of the beak to below the eyes. The red-headed woodpecker, red-napped woodpecker (formerly the yellow-bellied sapsucker), Williamson's sapsucker, hairy woodpecker, and downy woodpecker also occasionally cause problems in Colorado.

Damage Identification

Woodpeckers can cause an annoyance by hammering or "drumming" on houses and property damage by drilling holes in wood siding and eaves. Woodpeckers hammer to attract mates, establish and/or defend a territory, excavate nesting or roosting sites, and search for insects. Wooden shingles, cedar or redwood siding, metal or plastic guttering, television antennas, and light posts are selected as drumming sites because these materials produce loud sounds. The majority of damage occurs to cedar, rough pine and redwood siding although masonite and stucco siding also are occasionally damaged. Drumming

is most common in the spring during early morning and late afternoon and usually ends by July 1st.

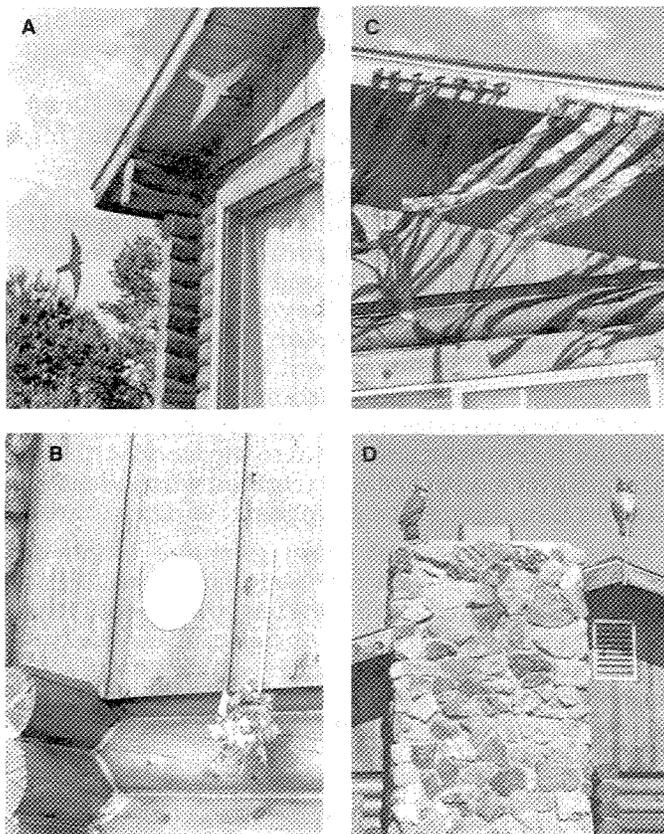


Figure 1: Hawk mobiles (A), 7½-inch diameter shaving mirrors and pinwheel (B), black plastic or aluminum foil strips (C), and owl effigies (D) can be mounted near damage sites to frighten woodpeckers.

Control Methods

Woodpecker damage can be prevented or eliminated with several techniques including visual repellents, loud noises, exclusion, alter-

¹George E. Graves, wildlife biologist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, APHIS; Animal Damage Control, and William F. Andelt, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist and assistant professor, fishery and wildlife biology (1/88)

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nate construction materials, and least preferably, killing. Immediate action should be taken to reduce damage because woodpeckers are not easily driven from their territories or pecking sites once they become established. Prompt repair of large holes may encourage the woodpecker to leave or discourage other woodpeckers because these holes may serve as visual attractants. The holes can be covered with aluminum flashing, tin can tops, or metal sheathing and painted to match the siding. If damage is occurring near areas that provide perch sites, elimination of these sites with metal flashing or other materials usually will solve the problem. If a single board on the house serves as a toe hold, heavy monofilament fishing line or stainless steel wire can be tightly stretched approximately 2 inches outward across the landing site to exclude the bird.

Preliminary research indicates that hawk silhouette mobiles and 7½-inch-diameter shaving mirrors that enlarge the image (Figure 1) are successful frightening devices. Hawk mobiles with a wing span of about 22 inches and a length of 11 inches can be constructed from cardboard, ½-inch styrofoam, or ¼-inch plywood following the outline shown in Figure 1. They should be painted black or another dark color. Usually 2 hawk mobiles should be hung from the eaves near the damaged area with monofilament line. On each side of the house where damage occurs, one or two shaving mirrors attached flat to the wood with the enlarging lens outward will frighten woodpeckers. Mirrors usually can be purchased at drug stores.

Black plastic, cut from garbage bags, or heavy-duty aluminum foil strips (Figure 1) 1 to 1½ inches wide and 2 to 3 feet long, pinwheels with reflective vanes (Figure 1), and aluminum pie tins (preferable 12 inches in diameter) can be placed near the damaged area to frighten woodpeckers. Allow the wind to blow the strips, pinwheels and pie tins freely.

Owl effigies (Figure 1) mounted on top of roofs, chimneys, or hung from the eaves near the damage sites also can frighten woodpeckers. Owl effigies can be purchased at garden, nursery or sporting goods stores, or ordered through most hunting supply catalogs.

Where woodpeckers are persistent, two or more of the above frightening devices may need to be used simultaneously.

Some woodpeckers can be frightened away with persistent loud noises such as banging pots and pans together, firing toy cap guns or yelling. Other woodpeckers can be discouraged by deadening the sound producing area by filling the hollow space behind the wood.

Woodpeckers can be excluded from damage sites under the eaves by attaching hardware cloth or plastic netting to the eaves, angling it back to the siding below the damaged area, and fastening it securely (Figure 2). The netting also can be fastened under the eaves, stretched down the side of the house 3 inches from the siding, and securely attached close to the ground. If the netting is installed properly, it barely will be visible from a distance and will be a long-term solution to the

problem. Netting used for bird damage control can be purchased from garden supply stores or catalogs.

Woodpeckers occasionally damage houses to obtain insects in the wood. Since insects seldom infest well-seasoned wood in Colorado, woodpeckers hammer holes to obtain insects primarily during the first two years after house construction. Insecticides or wood preservatives can deter woodpeckers by killing the insects.

Few chemicals that have objectionable tastes and odors are effective for repelling woodpeckers and none are currently registered for that use. Sticky bird repellents such as Tanglefoot® or Roost-No-More® applied to siding and other areas may discourage woodpeckers because it creates a tacky footing. However, some of the sticky bird repellents stain wood in hot weather. Repellents should be tested on a small, out-of-site area before applying extensively.

When several non-lethal control methods fail to deter nuisance woodpeckers, lethal control may be required as a last resort. Woodpeckers are classified as migratory nongame birds and are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. A federal permit is required before any lethal control methods can be employed. Penalties and fines are assessed to violators. Inquiries about permits should be made to: State Director, U.S. Department of Agriculture, APHIS—Animal Damage Control, 529 25½ Road, Suite B-113, Grand Junction, CO 81505, (303) 245-9618 or call (303) 236-0280 in Denver, Colorado.

In addition to the federal permit, the local district wildlife manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife should be informed when, where and the type of lethal control that will be used. County and city ordinances should be consulted before lethal control is employed within city limits.

In areas where woodpeckers are a persistent problem, future homeowners should consider constructing homes from materials that woodpeckers are not prone to damage such as brick, steel or aluminum siding, and asphalt shingles.

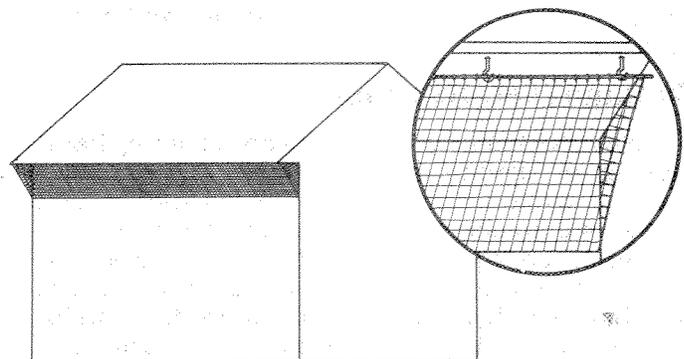


Figure 2: Plastic netting or wire mesh can be attached to a building from the outside edge of eave and angled back to the wood siding to exclude woodpeckers. Insert shows one method of attachment using hooks and wooden dowels. (Adapted from Woodpeckers [1983]), by Rex E. Marsh in R. M. Timm (ed.), *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.