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## Prevention and control of woodpecker damage

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no. 6.516

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### Quick Facts

The northern flicker, responsible for most woodpecker damage to Colorado homes, is identified in flight by a yellow or reddish tint under the wings and tail feathers.

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

Control damage by exclusion, scare devices and preventive construction.

Woodpeckers 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 northern flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), responsible for the most woodpecker damage to Colorado homes, is identified in flight by a yellow or salmon tint under the wings 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 (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), red-naped sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus*

*nuchalis*--formerly the yellow-bellied sapsucker), Williamson's sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*), hairy woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*), and downy woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) also occasionally cause problems in Colorado.

### Damage Identification

Woodpeckers 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, to establish and/or defend a territory, to excavate nesting or roosting sites, and to 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

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This information provided by:

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1. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist and associate professor, fishery and wildlife biology. 8/93. ©Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. 1994. For more information, contact your county Cooperative Extension office.

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produce loud sounds. Woodpeckers frequently damage cedar, rough pine, and redwood siding, and some synthetic stucco exterior finishing. Plywood and masonite are less frequently damaged. Drumming is most common in the spring during early morning and late afternoon and usually ends by July 1.

## Control Methods

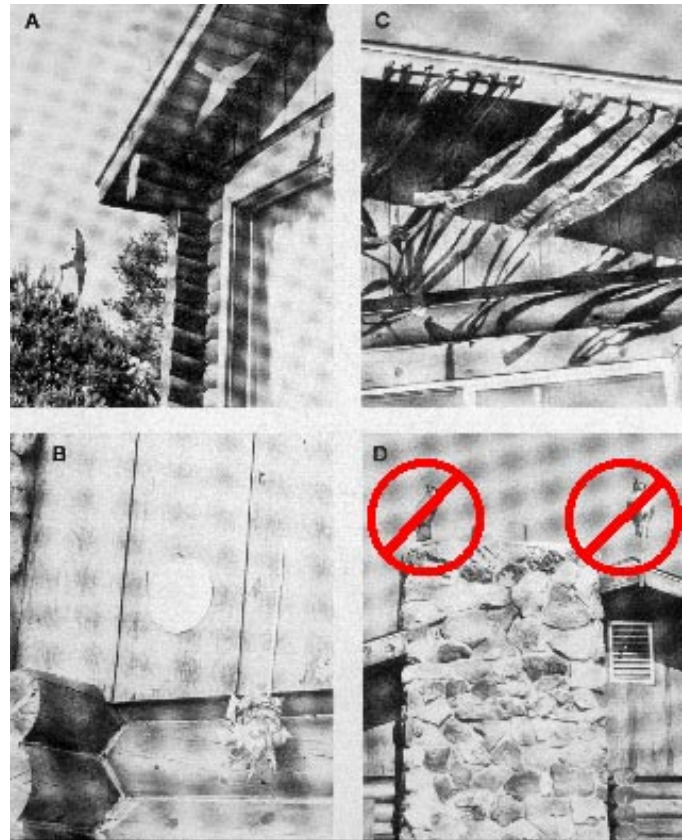
Woodpecker damage can be prevented or eliminated with several techniques including visual repellents, loud noises, exclusion, alternate construction materials, and least preferably, killing. Take immediate action to reduce damage because woodpeckers are not easily driven from their territories or pecking sites once they are established.

Prompt repair of large holes may encourage the woodpecker to leave or discourage other woodpeckers because these holes may serve as visual attractants. Cover the holes with aluminum flashing, tin can tops, or metal sheathing and paint them to match the siding. If damage occurs near areas that provide perch sites, eliminate these sites with metal flashing or other materials. 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 7-1/2-inch-diameter shaving or cosmetic mirrors that enlarge the image 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, 1/2-inch styrofoam, or 1/4-inch plywood (see Plate 1). Paint black or another dark color. Hang two hawk mobiles 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. Purchase mirrors at drugstores.

Place black plastic strips (cut from 4 or 6 mil plastic) 1 to 1 1/2 inches wide and 2 to 3 feet long, pinwheels with reflective vanes and aluminum pie tins (preferably 12 inches in diameter) near the damaged area to frighten woodpeckers. Allow the wind to blow the strips, pinwheels, and pie tins freely.

Owl effigies generally are unsuccessful for frightening woodpeckers.



Visual repellants for woodpeckers.

Where woodpeckers are persistent, use two or more of the above frightening devices simultaneously.

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

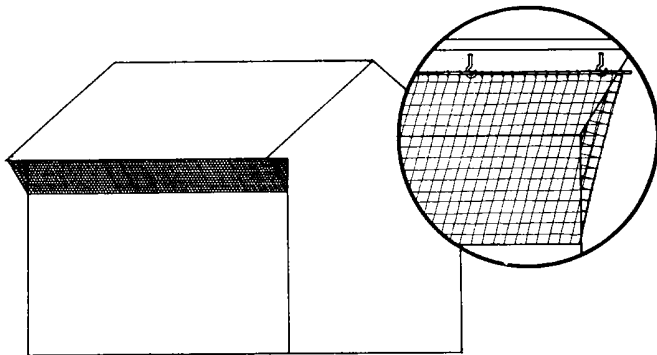
Woodpeckers can be excluded from damage sites under the eaves by attaching hardware cloth or plastic netting to the eaves, angling it back to the siding below the damaged area, and fastening it securely. Alternatively, fasten the netting under the eaves, stretch down the side of the house 3 inches from the siding, and securely attach close to the ground.

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 may 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 (Tanglefoot<sup>®</sup> or Roost-No-More<sup>®</sup>), 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. Test repellents on a small, out-of-sight 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 lethal control methods are employed. Penalties and fines are assessed to violators. Make inquiries about permits to: State Director, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, APHIS - Animal Damage Control, 529 25 1/2 Road, Suite B-113, Grand Junction, Colorado, 81505, (303) 245-9618 or call Denver, (303) 236-0280.

In addition to the Federal Permit, inform the local district wildlife manager from the Colorado Division of Wildlife of when, where, and the type of lethal control that will be used. Consult county and city ordinances before lethal control is employed within city limits.



**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.**