

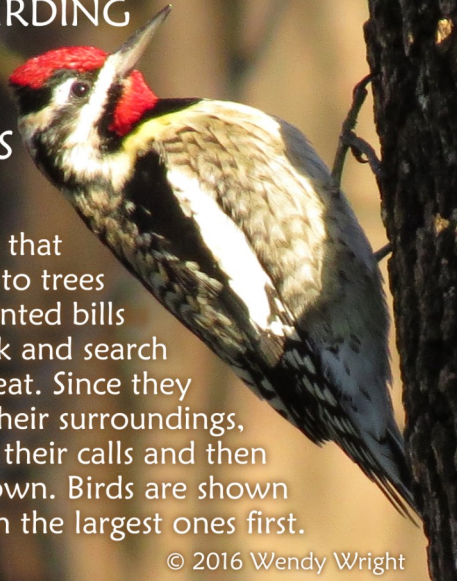
BAYOU CITY BIRDING

ZINE #8

WOODPECKERS

Woodpeckers have special feet and tails that allow them to cling to trees as they use their pointed bills to hammer into bark and search for the insects they eat. Since they tend to blend into their surroundings, it's best to listen for their calls and then try to track them down. Birds are shown in order of size, with the largest ones first.

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RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

FEMALE TO LEFT
MALE BELOW



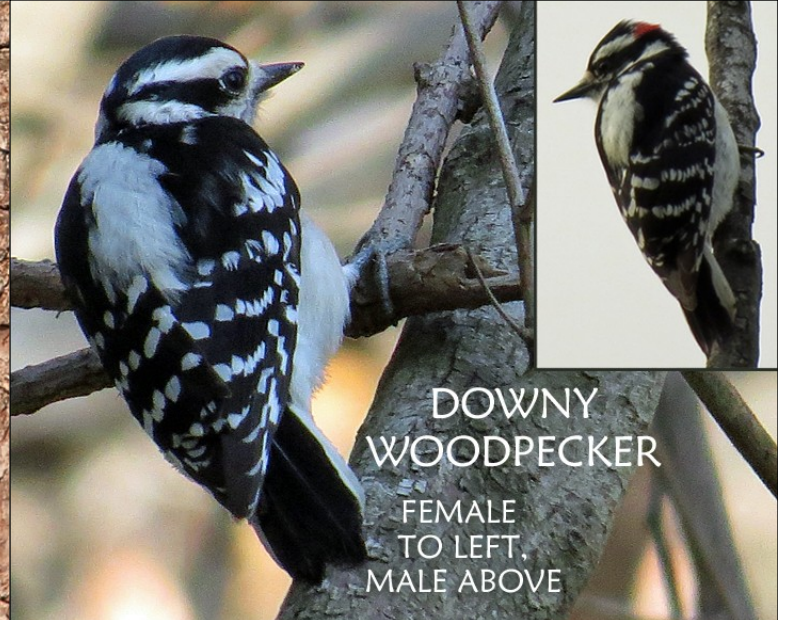
PILEATED WOODPECKER
FEMALE



YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER
MALE



NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED)
FEMALE TO LEFT, MALE TO RIGHT



DOWNY WOODPECKER
FEMALE TO LEFT, MALE ABOVE

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER



MALES AND FEMALES LOOK ALIKE

BROWN-HEADED JUVENILES



YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER TO LEFT, RED-HEAD TO RIGHT

LEARN MORE...

Woodpeckers drill holes for their homes into dead trees and dying limbs. Starlings give them an awful time, attacking fiercely and stealing their holes. You can help by putting up a nest box in your yard. Learn how at Nestwatch.org/Learn/All-About-Birdhouses.

Woodpeckers are different from other birds in several ways. They have extra-long, barbed tongues that help them grab insects, and special skulls that keep them from getting concussions as they pound on trees. Two of their four toes face backwards, and their extra stiff tails serve as props, which help them cling to trees. Learn their calls by matching each “sonogram” sketch to audio recordings (see Zine #5 for tips).

Download more of the Bayou City Birding Zines at WhiteOakBayou.org

PILEATED WOODPECKER

LOOK FOR: A big, long-necked, mostly black bird with a black and white striped face/neck, and a red “wig” that might have been snatched from a circus clown. Males have a thin red stripe behind the bill.

FIELD NOTES: Pileateds (pronounced PIE lee ay tids or PILL ee ay tids) aren’t common but can be found in parks and neighborhoods that have lots of tall pine trees. Pileateds carve out big rectangular or oblong nest holes. Look for their holes and listen for their loud calls and slow drumming, which can be heard far away.

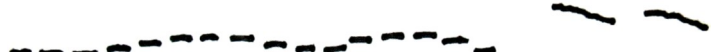

kuk kuk kuk kuk kuk kuk kuk... (or) wikwikwikwik...

1st SEEN ON AT

NORTHERN FLICKER

LOOK FOR: A bird who imitates the lady with all the animal print clothing. No other bird in Houston wears such a colorful combination of stripes and polka dots. Males add a black mustache. Watch for the yellow that shows underneath their wings/tail when they fly. West of here, red markings take the place of the yellow.

FIELD NOTES: While flickers spend some time in trees, they spend more time on the ground, feeding on their favorite food—ants! There are two types, with the “yellow-shafted” what you’ll see in Houston.



wic wic wic wic wic wic wic wic... (or) clear clear

1st SEEN ON AT

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

LOOK FOR: A shiny, metallic red head, bright white breast/belly/rump, wings that are half black and half white, and a black tail. Juveniles have a brown head and a lightly streaked breast/belly/tail.

FIELD NOTES: The beautiful Red-heads used to be the most common woodpecker in Houston, but are now really hard to find. Look for them when you can and then decide what you can do to help woodpeckers thrive. You might only be able to do a little, but if we all do a little, it will add up to a lot!



kwhere kwhere kwhere (or) churr churr churr

1st SEEN ON AT

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

LOOK FOR: A neon-red mohawk on a white face (females are missing the red section on top), black and white striped back/wings/tail, and an off-white breast and belly, which has a tiny hint of red. (And yes, many bird names are not all that helpful.)

FIELD NOTES: Red-bellies are Houston’s most common woodpecker and will perch in plain sight in trees and on telephone poles. Draw them and other woodpeckers into your yard by hanging feeders that hold sunflower seeds, suet, or fresh fruit.


churr churr churr (or) cha cha cha cha cha

1st SEEN ON AT

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

LOOK FOR: A mix of thin and wide black and white stripes (look for the long one at the edge of the folded wing), red forehead, and cross hatching on the breast/belly (which is more tan than yellow, go figure...) Males add a red throat. Juveniles have no red.

FIELD NOTES: Yellow-bellies drill horizontal rows of holes on live trees, returning often to drink the sweet sap and eat the insects it draws. Because they blend into their surroundings, the easiest way to find them is to look for their holes and then keep an eye out.


chewuu chewuu chewuu chewuu

1st SEEN ON AT

DOWNY WOODPECKER

LOOK FOR: A small bird (ten could fit inside a Pileated Woodpecker) with a black and white striped face and wings, black and white tail, white breast/belly/back, and a very short bill. Males have a small red square at the back of the head.

FIELD NOTES: Downies are common but are hard to find—listen for their calls so that you’ll know where to look. But approach slowly, because woodpeckers are shy birds and will often move to the back side of the tree or fly off if they catch you looking at them.


dee dee dee dee deladeladaaah (or) deladeladaaaaah

1st SEEN ON AT

WHEN AND WHERE...

Five of these woodpeckers live in Houston year round, with the Sapsuckers here from October through April.

And it’s sad, but although Red-bellies and Downies are easy to find, the other woodpeckers are disappearing from Houston because of the loss of the dead and dying trees on which they depend. While many people think that dead trees should be cut down, dead trees are an important part of the cycle of life, providing homes for birds like woodpeckers, wrens, flycatchers and owls, and supporting the insects they eat.

The friends of the West 11th Street Park do a great job of showing what can happen when dead trees (or even just their trunks) are allowed to remain in place. Their park is one of only a few places inside the 610 Loop where you can find all six woodpeckers. Go visit them!