Feeding

Woodpeckers may be attracted to buildings to feed on insect larvae. Voids in a building's siding provide excellent insect nesting sites and hiding places. This is especially true of plywood siding. The siding has routed groves that expose voids in the plywood layers, making them a natural nesting site for insects. Lap siding that is not nailed down tightly can provide voids for insects. Also as flat-grained boards (sawed tangent to the growth rings) age and dry, the growth rings tend to separate from the rest of the wood, providing an opening for insects (Figure 5). Damage caused when woodpeckers feed on insect larvae can usually be identified by rows of cone-shaped holes (Figure 6) and is more common in plywood siding or near the edge of lap siding.

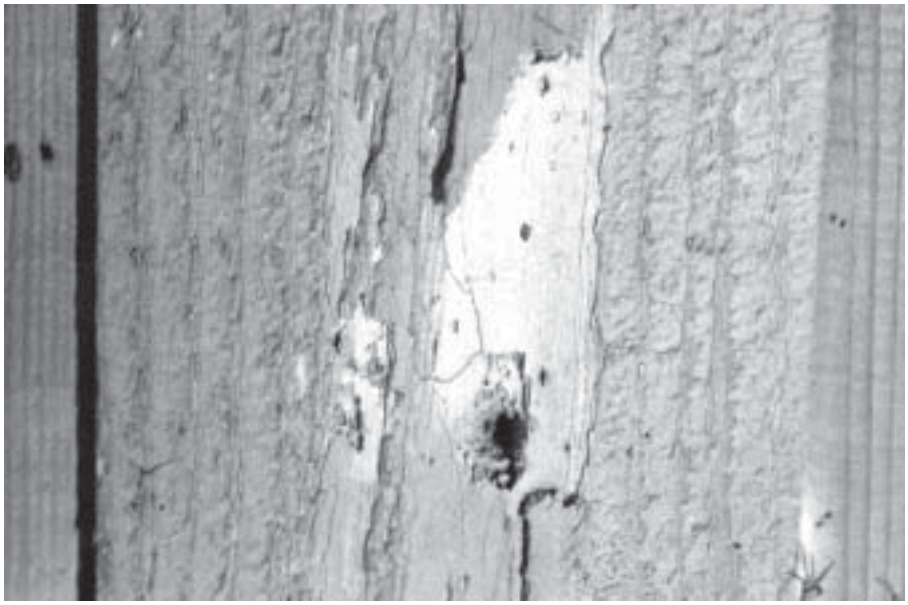

Figure 5—When growth rings separate from the rest of the wood, insects can enter a building's siding. Woodpeckers damage the siding when they feed on the insects.

Figure 6—Woodpeckers leave rows of cone-shaped holes when they feed on insect larvae in wood siding.

Solving Problems Related to Feeding

Insect nests can sometimes be destroyed by using a long stiff wire to poke through the voids in the plywood. After the larvae have been killed, the entry should be caulked shut. Repair the damage and make the repair look like the rest of the building.

Typically, woodpeckers will not spend energy looking for insects in a sound building. The way to prevent foraging woodpeckers from damaging buildings is to protect the wood from insects. Regularly protecting the wood with a sealer will discourage most insects.

Roofs made from wooden shakes or shingles can be replaced with tin. Metal roofs will eliminate nesting and hiding places for insects. They will also help protect the building from fire.

Drumming

Drumming is probably more of a nuisance than a source of potential damage. Woodpeckers drum to defend their territories or attract mates. Wood siding, rain gutters, down spouts, or other metal surfaces on a building provide ideal drumming surfaces for woodpeckers. Little can be done to reduce the loud sound produced as woodpeckers drum on these surfaces.

Solving Problems Related to Drumming

One solution may be to construct an alternate drumming site away from residences. A drum can be made by using two overlapping boards. Secure the end of one board to the tree. Cover the end of the other board with sheet metal. Another possibility would be to secure a metal cylinder, such as a gutter downspout, to a tree.

Other Possible Solutions

Many devices are available to scare birds away. They include hawk silhouettes, pinwheels, mirrors, reflective ribbon, and reflective holographic ribbon. Most of these are highly visible reflective devices that move with the wind. Any one of these devices may work some of the time, but none work all of the time. The sooner these devices are tried after detecting the problem, the better the chances of success.

Some sound devices play recorded bird distress cries or the cry of hawks. Others produce ultrasonic sound waves that people cannot hear. Managers may buy some time by using scare tactics, but these methods usually only work for short periods of time until the bird has grown accustomed to them.

See the *References* section for other resources that may help you solve your problems.

Repairing Damage Caused by Woodpeckers

To repair a hole, cover it from the inside by securing a board to the siding. Cut a plug the same size as the hole from the same material as the siding. Make sure it is the same thickness. Secure the plug to the board behind the hole. Fill the gap around the plug and any adjacent damage with caulk. Finish the repair to match the existing siding.

If there is no access to the back side of the hole, or if looks are a consideration, use techniques similar to those used when patching drywall. Reshape the hole into a rectangle with the desired dimensions and cut it out using a keyhole or reciprocating saw. **Caution: Electrical wiring or plumbing may be under the board.** Secure two cleats to the siding inside the opening, one opposite the other, so the plug cannot slip through. Cut the plug from a piece of siding that matches the grain, texture, and thickness of the siding, oriented so the grain matches the grain around the hole. Cut the plug to the same dimensions as the hole, allowing for the saw kerf on each side. Secure the plug to the cleats, caulk any gaps around the edges, and finish the repair to match the existing siding.

Another approach would be to saw two opposite sides of the opening on a bevel when reshaping the hole. The plug would be cut to match the bevel. These bevels would provide the surface the plug would be secured to. Fill small, cone-shaped holes with caulk. Texture and finish the repair to match the existing siding.

If damage is extensive, the siding may have to be replaced or covered with a more durable product such as siding made from steel, aluminum, or plastic. These materials are generally more resistant to damage. If new construction is planned near an area with woodpecker problems, one of these materials should be considered, rather than rough-sawed plywood or other wooden siding.

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World Wide Web Homepages

Nest Boxes

http://www.nestbox.com
http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/by/house.html

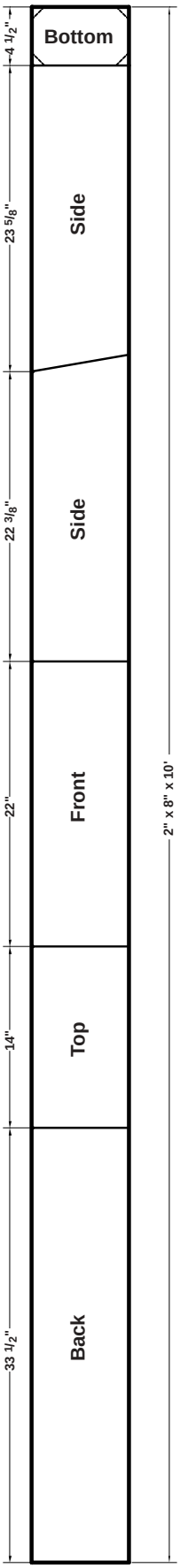
Scare Devices/Barriers/Repellents

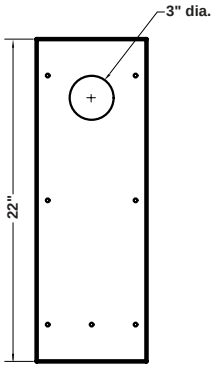
http://www.bird-x.com
http://www.birdbarrier.com
http://www.vsf24.com

General Information on Woodpeckers

http://www.msue.msu.edu/genesee/natres/woodpeck.htm
http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/iiin/woodpeck.html
http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/by/byprob.html
http://www.colostate.edu/depts/CoopExt/PUBS/NATRES/06516.html
http://hammock.ifas.ufl.edu/txt/fairs/17040
http://ag.arizona.edu/pito/pdf/apjul98a.pdf
http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod03/01701333.html

Appendix A—Drawings for a Northern Flicker Nest Box





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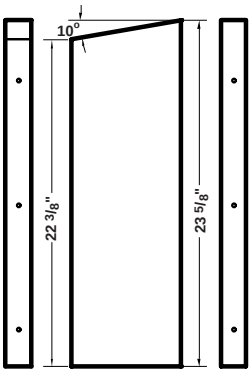

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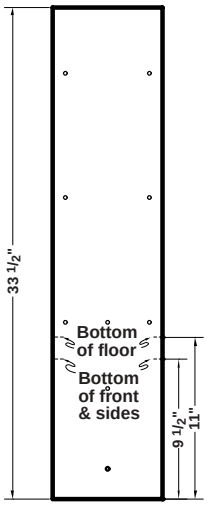

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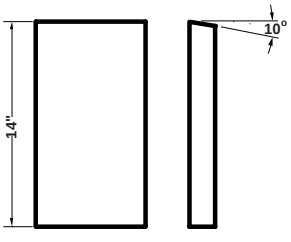
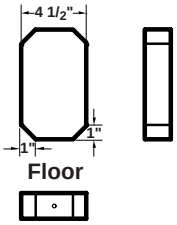
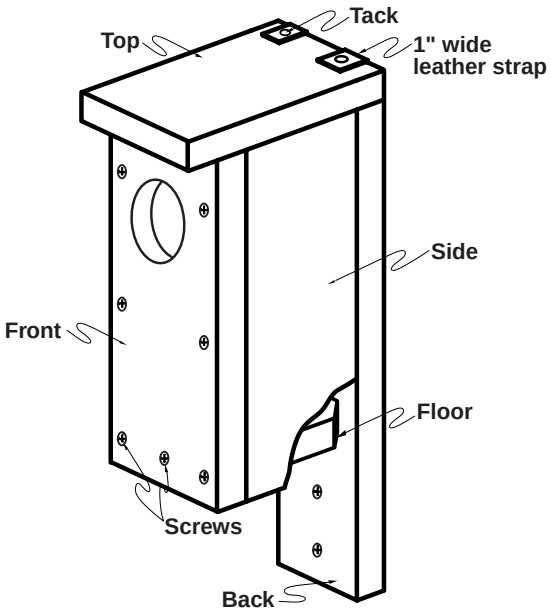
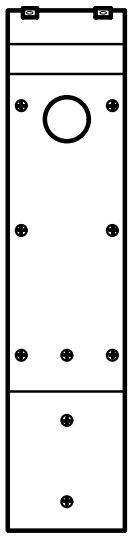


Top



Floor





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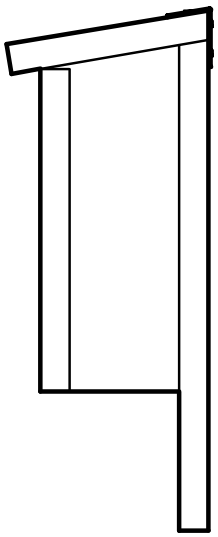

Side

Northern Flicker Nest Box

About the Authors…

Tony Jasumback, now retired, was a Senior Project Engineer working on projects in the Forest Health Protection, Engineering, Fire and Aviation, and Reforestation and Nurseries Programs. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Missouri at Rolla in 1961. He joined the Forest Service in 1963, working for the Architecture Department in the Northern Region (R1) and later for the Colville National Forest in road design. He came to MTDC in 1965 as a design and test engineer, retiring in 2000.

Lisa Bate is a cooperative Research Associate with the University of Idaho and the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station, living in Kalispell, MT. She received a master's degree in wildlife resources from the University of Idaho at Moscow in 1995. She has been working with woodpeckers and their habitat since 1992.

Steve Oravetz graduated from the University of Washington in Civil Engineering and is a licensed Professional Civil Engineer. He began his career on the Wenatchee National Forest in 1980. He became Chief Engineer for the Northeastern Research Station in 1993. In 1996, he became Engineering Program Leader at MTDC.

Library Card

Jasumback, Tony; Bate, Lisa; Oravetz, Steve. 1999. How to prevent woodpeckers from damaging buildings. Rep. 0071-2847-MTDC. Missoula, MT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center. 10 p.

Describes techniques that can be used to try to reduce the damage woodpeckers cause to Forest Service facilities. Discusses ways in which facilities managers can provide snags that woodpeckers can use for nesting, reducing their need to use buildings for nest sites. An appendix contains plans for a Northern Flicker nest box. Another appendix includes a print of a 1994 report addressing damage caused by woodpeckers.

Keywords: bird control, bird repellents, bird scarers, buildings, facilities, maintenance, nest boxes

Additional single copies of this document may be ordered from:

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