

DOWNY WOODPECKER

Picoides pubescens



Range

Downy woodpeckers are our smallest and most commonly seen woodpeckers. They prefer open woodlands, orchards and parks everywhere in the United States except for the driest parts of the southwest.



Birds

DOWNY WOODPECKER

Picoides pubescens



Appearance

Length: 7 inches
Wing span: 12 inches
Weight: 1 ounce

Downy woodpeckers are small birds with white stomachs, breasts and backs and black tails and wings. Wings have rows of white spots. Males have a red cap on the back of their heads which the females lack.

Behavior

Habit: Diurnal, cavity building, **altricial insectivore**

Diet: Primarily insects but some fruit, seeds and sap.

Breeding territory: 1 pair per 24 acres

Male downy woodpeckers display a lot when courting or defending territory. Their displays consist of crest raising, dancing and drumming on trees. Sexes **forage** separately with the male preferring the smaller branches and the upper canopy layers.



Habitat

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Downy Woodpeckers & Man

Downy woodpeckers prefer the same habitat as man, open woodlands, orchards and suburbs. They are unafraid of humans and will often come to feeders during the winter.

Downy woodpeckers, like any other woodpeckers, need dead trees to hollow out for their nests. It is important to leave dead trees standing if they don't endanger people or property.

Life Cycle

Sexual maturity: Less than one year

Mating season: Spring and early summer
Downy woodpeckers usually nest only once.

Gestation: Eggs hatch in 12 days, young fledge 20 to 25 days after that.

No. of young: 3-6, usually 4-5. Eggs are white and 8/10 of an inch long.

Legend Has It ...

The red patch on the head of the male bird inspired legends with many Native America tribes across the United States, from being a fire detective to bearer of a warrior's badge of courage. This diminutive bird has been a symbol of bravery and hard work.

Now You Know!

- › Downy woodpeckers create nest hole openings that are concealed by fungus or lichens.
- › Each bird digs its own winter roost.
- › Downies are one of the few woodpeckers that will come to feeders.
- › Downie's nests are lined with woodchips. The young are **altricial** and remain dependant on the adults for up to 3 weeks for food and bodily warmth.
- › The males does most of the **brooding**.
- › Woodpeckers may hammer on a tree as much as 10 times a minute.
- › Their brain is protected from shock by a pad of spongy elastic material between their bill and their skull.
- › Special feathers around their nostrils keep them from breathing in wood chips.
- › Spines on the ends of their stiff tail feathers act as braces as they climb or drill.