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# WEEKEND BREAK



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Hairy woodpeckers use their stiff tail feathers to brace against tree trunks and branches.  
 Photos by Madeline Kalbach

## GETTING TO KNOW THE BIRDS

### Woodpeckers in the Pacific Northwest

By MADELINE KALBACH

**T**welve species of woodpeckers breed in the Pacific Northwest. They are excavating specialists, colorful and energetic. Their behavior is interesting and they are fun to watch.

On the Long Beach Peninsula, five species of breeding woodpeckers have been recorded to date. The red-breasted sapsucker, the small downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, the familiar northern flicker and the very strikingly beautiful pileated woodpecker are all here year-round. All but the northern flicker are uncommon, which means considered to be present, but not certain to be seen. Northern flickers, however, are common year-round residents. I hear their voices loud and clear daily, and often see them as they fly from tree to tree, their white rump visible all the way.

If you see a woodpecker, make note of its feeding behavior. Some like the northern flickers forage on the ground for ants and other insects, but they will also eat berries in winter and readily come to seed and suet feeders. They especially enjoy the suet I put out because it is full of insects and mealworms. All woodpeckers love these treats, especially in winter.

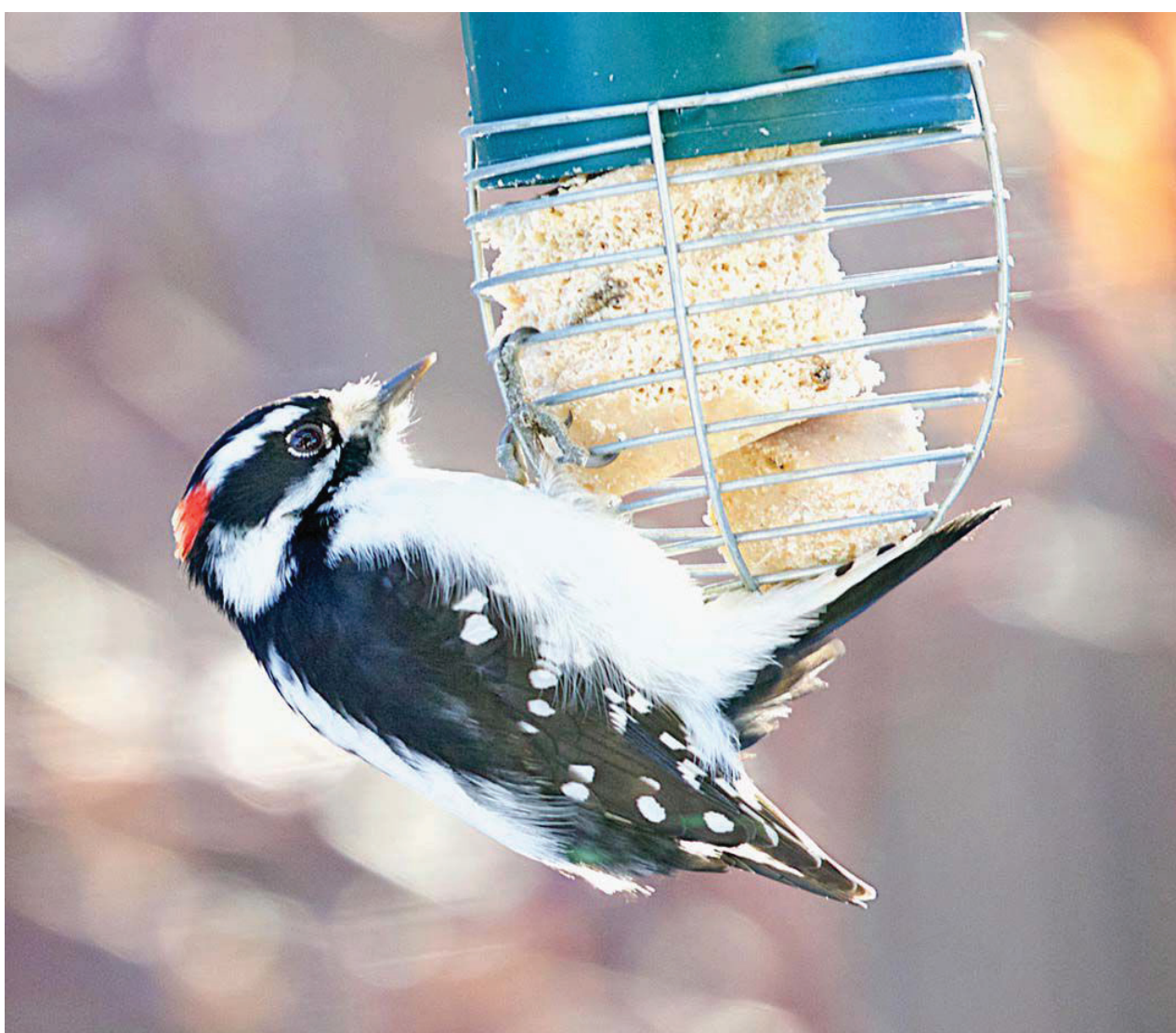
Sapsuckers drill holes in trees called wells, and feed on the sap that drains out, as well as feeding on the insects that also feed on the sap. Thirsty woodpeckers of all of our species will come to a bird bath for a refreshing drink, and if there is snow in the area they will even “eat” or “drink” the snow if a bird bath or another water source isn’t nearby or accessible.

Woodpeckers use their stiff tail feathers as a brace when clinging to a tree, and when clinging to a suet feeder. They typically perch vertically on trees. They use their bill as if it were a chisel to drill into the tree bark in search of insects and when they are constructing nest holes. These behaviors are indicative of a woodpecker and is a good tip to use when identifying the bird. Male woodpeckers generally have red on their heads, while females generally do not.

The most spectacular of the woodpeckers is the pileated. Even the female of the species sports red on her head and crown. The male’s red is a little more extensive being on the head, crown and forehead. At just over 16 inches, it is the largest woodpecker in the Northwest.

I have been paying close attention to woodpeckers of late. In particular, I have been observing the behavior of the northern flicker. Watching them drink water and snow has been possible lately. What a treat it is to see

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Downy woodpeckers are much smaller than their look-a-like, the hairy woodpecker.



The flicker is using its tail as a brace as it clings to this bird feeder.



The pileated woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in the Northwest.