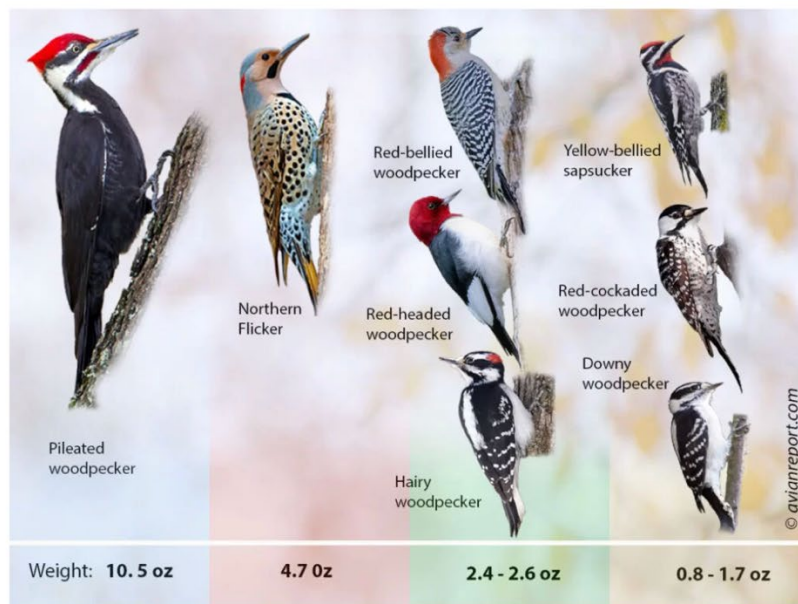


## Pretty and Pesky Woodpeckers

A pleasure to watch, woodpeckers can be heard long before they're seen. According to resident and experienced birder, Dick Murray, the best way to see woodpeckers in Winding Cypress is to take a quiet stroll on the boardwalk into the preserve (which gets you into the woodpeckers' domain).

Species you might see are downy, hairy, red-cockaded, red-bellied, red-headed, pileated, and northern flicker. The red-bellied is the most common woodpecker found in Florida. (1) According to Dick, the red-bellied are active, noisy, and can be found in the preserve and around our homes. Pileated (the model for Woody Woodpecker) are the largest species found here, with a very loud call they are most likely seen in the preserve areas as they tend to prefer large dead trees. The downy is the small, cute species that is quieter than its cousins. The northern flickers and yellow-bellied sapsuckers can be observed in WC, but are somewhat irregular in their visits. The hairy woodpecker is unlikely to be seen in WC, but the red-headed and red-cockaded can often be found in Serenity Walk Park, a couple of miles north, on Collier Blvd.



In **Florida**, most **woodpeckers** have a combination of black, white, and red feathers. Males and females are distinguished by patches of red on the backs of their heads. Males have red patches, which are missing in the females.

The handsome red-headed woodpecker is an exception. It has a bright crimson head, and males and females are indistinguishable.

Year round, woodpeckers thrive on wood-boring insects such as termites and carpenter ants but will also eat flying insects, berries, and seeds. Using their strong bill, they chisel tree trunks extracting their food. The drilling sound is sporadic so as not to scare their insect

food away. Soft sporadic drilling sounds can also be heard when a woodpecker is using its bill to excavate a nest cavity. Shapes and sizes of the cavity can help determine which woodpecker species is in your yard. Tapping rapidly in a unique pattern (known as “drumming”) is not the sound of a woodpecker obtaining food. Drumming is sending a signal that their territory is occupied, or that they are searching for a mate.

Woodpeckers are advantageous in urban areas as they eat destructive insects such as termites, but sometimes a pesky woodpecker will come knocking, choosing a house wall, siding, or decorative foam molding. If your house has attracted a woodpecker, it is time to see what can be modified to prevent it returning but not harm the woodpecker. If, however, the birds are looking for insects, (the holes they make will be small and irregular) you may have to call an exterminator to get rid of the underlying insect problem.

Common long-term deterrents have been tested to see how well each prevented woodpecker damage. The methods tested included life-sized plastic owls with paper wings, reflective streamers, plastic eyes on fishing line, roost boxes, suet feeders, and a sound system which broadcasted woodpecker distress calls followed by the call of a hawk. Only the streamers worked as a deterrent with any consistency: the shiny coating and movement in the wind kept the woodpeckers at bay and eliminated damage at half of the test sites. Plastic owls and distress calls may work at first, but after a while the woodpeckers get used to them and go back to their old habitat. Bottom line, unfortunately: nothing works all the time. (2)

Worth mentioning, standing dead trees, such as palm trunks, also make a great habitat to attract a woodpecker in our community. Although we leave these dead trees in our preserves, you should report a dead palm tree in any common area to management, or one in your yard to BrightView.

1. <https://avianreport.com/woodpeckers-florida/#:~:text=The%20red%2Dbellied%20woodpecker%20is,their%20cavities%20in%20dead%20wood>
2. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/can-woodpecker-deterrents-secure-my-house/>

