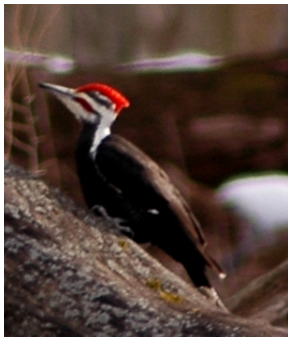


November 2010

Creature Feature Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers have an odd lot in life - most spend their days perched on the side of a tree, pounding away at wood in order to lick up a tasty insect morsel. The challenges that they face are many, but woodpeckers are well adapted to their lifestyle.



We might expect that woodpeckers would be prone to concussions or brain damage due to their habit of pounding away at solid wood, but clearly this is not a problem for them. At the base of their bill, where it attaches to the skull, there is a spongy material that helps absorb the impact. The brain of a woodpecker is packed tightly in its skull with little extra space for it to move and when pounding at full force, woodpeckers hammer straight on, avoiding damage that could come from lateral stresses on their skull and brain. So even though a Pileated Woodpecker can pound up to 20 times a second with incredible force on solid wood, they are designed to take the hit.

The tongue of a woodpecker is another interesting adaptation. Many woodpecker tongues are especially long, some are able to extend up to 4 inches beyond the tip of their bill. The tongues are also barbed on the ends and often coated with sticky saliva. These adaptations help them to capture ants, beetles, and grubs from within the wood of a tree.

As you wander our trails or watch birds from home, take a moment to appreciate the adaptations of woodpeckers as they work away at securing a meal or constructing a nest site.

Nature Notes

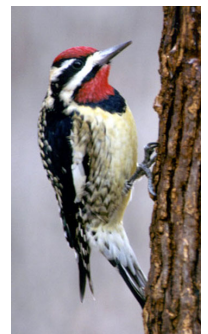
The **Pileated Woodpecker** is our largest woodpecker standing between 16 and 19.5 inches tall. This bird excavates oblong holes and is able to pound on solid, healthy trees.



The **Downy Woodpecker** is our smallest woodpecker at only 6.5 inches from head to tail. It can often be seen at our suet feeders and searching for insects among the ridges of bark.



Some woodpeckers like the **Northern** (or Yellow-shafted) **Flicker** and the **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** are migratory in this area. The Flicker prefers eating ants from the ground while the Sapsucker drills holes in trees and licks up the dripping sap.



Visit the Visitor Center Office for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.