

THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

HAIRY WOODPECKERS

When winter arrives summertime avian residents and migrant bird species have come and gone. However, many interesting year-round flying friends remain including the hairy woodpecker.

At 9 1/2 inches in length, predominately black with white markings, males sport a red patch behind their heads. Widespread across North America to Panama, they look almost identical to the smaller downy woodpecker in an example of convergent evolution. In a side note, hairy woodpeckers tend to feed on the trunks of trees while downy woodpeckers prefer the branches. Most of their diet consists of nuts, tree sap, and bugs. The good news for Coloradoans is that pine bark beetles are among their favorite food. Two forward-facing toes and two backward-facing toes on each foot allow the woodpeckers to scale up and down as they feel for the vibrations of boring insects. They can even hear beetles and their larvae chomping on wood! Easily attracted to suet cakes and black oil sunflower seed, hairy woodpeck-

ers sometimes bang on house's gutters, siding, or stovepipes with their long ebony beaks to announce their presence. A rattling call and "peek" are other sounds you might hear when they are in the vicinity.

Hairy woodpeckers are cavity nesters and only select live trees to raise their young. The males incubate the 3 – 6 eggs during the day and females at night. Other species of birds will use the excavated holes when they nest the following years.



*Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us.
His imagery can be found on his web site at www.davegibsonimages.com*