

# Downy Woodpecker

*Picoides pubescens*

The active little Downy Woodpecker is a familiar sight at backyard feeders and in parks and woodlots, where it joins flocks of chickadees and nuthatches, barely outsizeing them. An often acrobatic forager, this black-and-white woodpecker is at home on tiny branches or balancing on slender plant galls, sycamore seed balls, and suet feeders. Downies and their larger lookalike, the Hairy Woodpecker, are one of the first identification challenges that beginning bird watchers master.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

Downy Woodpeckers are small versions of the classic woodpecker body plan. They have a straight, chisel-like bill, blocky head, wide shoulders, and straight-backed posture as they lean away from tree limbs and onto their tail feathers. The bill tends to look smaller for the bird's size than in other woodpeckers.

### Color Pattern

Downy Woodpeckers give a checkered black-and-white impression. The black upperparts are checked with white on the wings, the head is boldly striped, and the back has a broad white stripe down the center. Males have a small red patch on the back of the head. The outer tail feathers are typically white with a few black spots.

### Behavior

Downy Woodpeckers hitch around tree limbs and trunks or drop into tall weeds to feed on galls, moving more acrobatically than larger woodpeckers. Their rising-and-falling flight style is distinctive of many woodpeckers. In spring and summer, Downy Woodpeckers make lots of noise, both with their shrill whinnying call and by drumming on trees.

### Habitat

You'll find Downy Woodpeckers in open woodlands, particularly among deciduous trees, and brushy or weedy edges. They're also at home in orchards, city parks, backyards and vacant lots.

## Cool Facts

- Downy Woodpeckers have been discovered nesting inside the walls of buildings.
- The oldest known Downy Woodpecker lived to be at least 11 years 11 months old.

## Measurements

### Both Sexes

- Length - 5.6 - 6.7 inches
- Wingspan - 9.8 - 11.8 inches
- Weight - 0.7 - 1.0 ounces

