

Bird Notes for Hikers #3: Woodpecker drumming. May 17, 2020

Woodpeckers drum to establish and protect a territory and to attract a mate. In at least some species, both male and female can drum. The woodpecker finds a suitable location and material which makes an appropriate sound. Drumming is different from pecking to find food or to make a nest hole.

Some drumming sounds can be identified to species easily while others are more difficult.

Three of our common species, **Downy** and **Hairy Woodpecker** and **Northern Flicker** make drumming sounds which are very similar and difficult to tell apart without a lot of practice and skill.

The **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, however, has a very distinctive drum: like Morse code. This species also likes to find metal flashing or pipe on a building to ensure a louder sound.

The **Pileated Woodpecker** makes a loud, hollow-sounding, ringing drum which can be heard over a great distance; when heard, the bird is often far away.