

NEWS RELEASE  
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## ACORN WOODPECKERS

### BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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As most of us are aware, the acorn woodpecker is common in Mariposa County. With short, clawed legs, backward-pointed toes and stiff tail feathers, this bird clings easily to the trunks and branches of trees, wood siding, or utility poles while pecking.

Woodpeckers have the ability to peck into trees in search of food or excavate nest cavities. One common misconception is that they peck holes in buildings only in search of insects. The acorn woodpecker drills holes in wood simply to store acorns.

Woodpeckers have characteristic calls, but they also use a rhythmic pecking sequence to make their presence known. Referred to as "drumming," it establishes their territories and apparently attracts or signals mates.

Woodpecker damage to buildings is a common problem. Houses with wood exteriors are most apt to suffer pecking and hole damage. Most of the damage occurs from February through June, which corresponds with the breeding season. The acorn woodpecker is responsible for drilling closely spaced holes just large enough to accommodate one acorn each. Wedging acorns between or beneath roof shakes and filling unscreened rooftop plumbing vents with acorns are also common activities. Widespread damage from nest cavities and acorn holes in utility and fence poles in some areas has necessitated frequent and costly replacement of weakened poles.

Woodpeckers are classified as migratory, nongame birds and are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Some methods of reducing woodpecker damage that do not infringe upon their legal protection status are available.

## DAMAGE PREVENTION CONTROL METHODS

### Exclusion:

Netting is one of the most effective methods of excluding woodpeckers from damaging wood siding beneath the eaves. Place lightweight plastic bird-type netting over the area. A mesh of 3/4 inch is generally recommended. At least three inches of space should be left between the netting and the damaged building so that birds cannot cause damage through the mesh. In addition to metal sheathing or plastic sheeting, quarter inch hardware cloth has also been used to cover pecked areas and prevent further damage. The wire can either be attached directly to the wood surface being damaged, or raised outward from the wood siding with one-inch wood spacers.

### Frightening Devices:

Visual devices such as model hawks or owls or simulated snakes, are generally considered ineffective as repellents. Stretching reflective mylar tape strips across a damaged area, or attaching them to the eaves and letting them hang down is an alternative to aluminum strips. Expensive high-frequency sound producing devices are marketed for controlling various pest birds, but rarely provide advertised results. High-frequency sound is above the normal audible hearing range of humans, but unfortunately, above the range of most birds too.

## Repellents:

Many chemicals that have objectionable tastes as well as odors have been tested for treating utility poles and fence posts to discourage woodpeckers. Most have proven ineffective or at least not cost-effective. Sticky bird repellents smeared in wavy bands with a caulking gun can be effective in discouraging birds if applied to wood siding. The birds are not entrapped by the sticky substance, but rather dislike the tacky footing.

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