

## Red-bellied Woodpecker

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Despite its common name, this bird's pinkish belly patch is difficult to see under normal viewing conditions. The black-and-white zebra pattern on its back is a much-more prominent feature.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are beneficial to farmers, forests, and humans. They eat numerous insects, saving crops and trees from damage and minimizing dependence on pesticides. If you're fortunate enough to have them nesting near your home, you'll be bothered less often by ants, flies, and other pesky insects.



### Interesting Facts:

**Family:** Picidae

**Scientific Name:** *Melanerpes carolinus*

**Location:** Red-bellied woodpeckers are found in the eastern half of the United States, from the plains states to the Atlantic coast. They also range as far north as Ontario and as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. Their habitat consists of forested areas - primarily hardwood - but also pine-hardwood mixed forests, swampy woodlands, and wooded lowlands adjacent to lakes and rivers.

**Migration:** In severe winters, birds occupying the northernmost regions of their range may migrate southward to areas where the weather is less severe.

**Nesting:** During courtship, males are known for tapping, kwirr calls, and drumming. After pairing, the male excavates a cavity in a dead (or sometimes live) tree. He makes the nest about 1 foot deep, and lines it with wood chips. The female lays one egg per day, with an average clutch size of four. Both males and females incubate the eggs, and after hatching (about 12 days later) they both take care of the hatchlings. Hatchlings leave the nest after 24-27 days.

<b>Diet:</b>	Woodpeckers are omnivorous. They eat a large variety of insects, including ants, flies, grasshoppers, lizards, frogs, insect larvae, caterpillars, and more. They also eat acorns, beechnuts, seeds of dogwood, fruit, and <a href="#">feeder seeds</a> and <a href="#">suet cakes</a> . They search for food mainly on trunks and limbs of trees, and females typically forage higher on the trees than males. They are known to hide seeds in tree crevices, and in winter they frequent <a href="#">feeders</a> for seeds.
<b>Size and Color:</b>	Red-bellied woodpeckers measure 9-10" in length, with a wingspan of 16". They have a light cream chest, with black and white wings. The male's crown is red, as is the nape of his neck, but the female has red on her nape only. The pinkish belly patch that gives these birds their common name is rarely visible.
<b>Song:</b>	"chuck, chuck, chuck" and a repeated "churr" or "kwirr"
<b>Special Characteristics:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its tongue is long and sticky with a spear-like tip - specially adapted to excavate insects from small cracks</li> <li>• Normally tree-cavity nesters, they sometimes take occupancy in a <a href="#">birdhouse</a> if it is large enough to accommodate them</li> <li>• They have thick skulls and strong necks to prevent damage to the brain when in the pecking position</li> <li>• Two of its toes face forward, and two face rearward, to help grasp tree bark and to back out of tree holes</li> <li>• The Red-bellied woodpecker is usually found solo - except in breeding season, when mated pairs are seen together</li> </ul>
<b>Attracting:</b>	They will frequent feeders, <a href="#">suet cakes</a> , and hardwood trees. They may even sip juice from a halved orange or grapefruit.
<b>Life Span:</b>	20+ years in the wild.