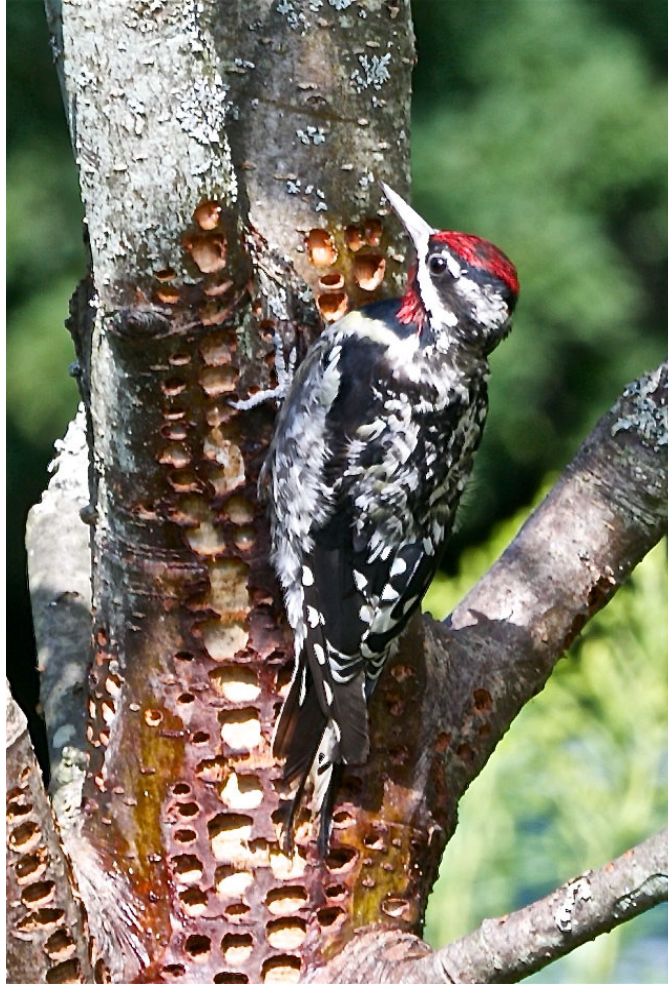


APRIL 15 - 30, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*,
male, drilling for sap. © Dick Harlow

The way to tell a male from a female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is to look for the throat. Both males and females have a red forecrown. The male, on the other hand, has a red throat while the female's is white. Both male and female have yellowish bellies though the female's is paler than the male. In this image of the male you are seeing the side of the bird not the belly which is why there is no indication of yellow. An immature does not show its gender colors or belly color until late winter.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*,
Immature. © Dick Harlow

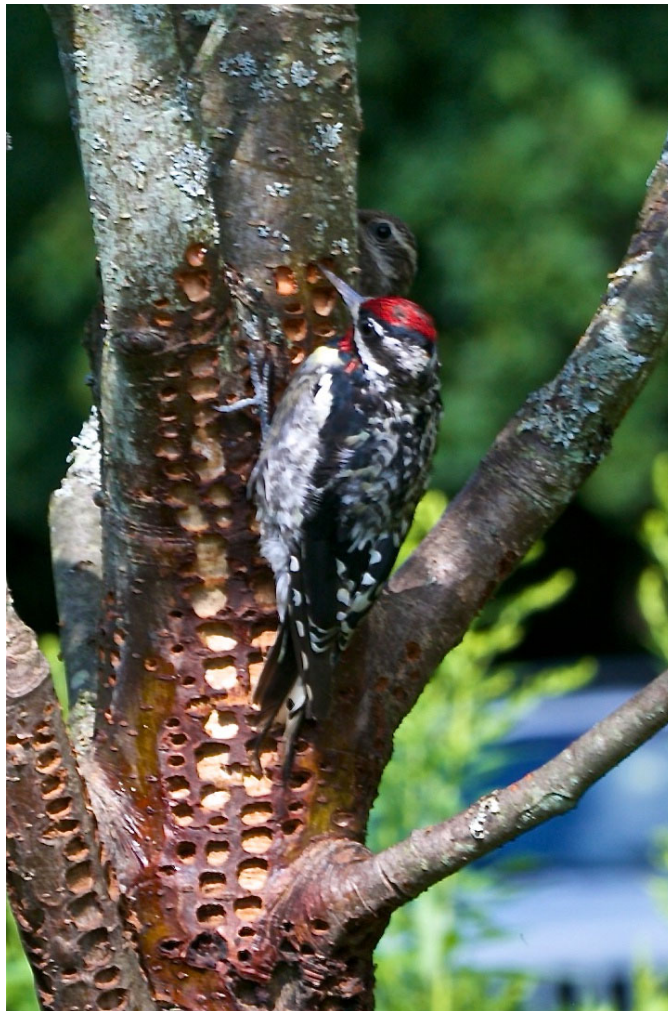
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These are cropped images of a male and an immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*, feeding on sap from a tree that they drilled. Wish I wrote down the name of the tree, but sorry, I didn't. However, these images show multiple drill holes that exhibit the extent the sapsucker will go to drill for a meal.

Does this cause damage to the tree? Yes, it can. When the sapsucker girdles the tree it usually kills the tree, however, that type of damage is rare.

We have had Yellow-bellied Sapsucker sightings here at EastView, but the sightings have been rather sparse.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*, both the male and immature (his head is behind the male's head). © Dick Harlow

Contrary to the solitary feeding behavior of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, this image shows that as parents they certainly are showing their offspring, by example, where to feed and how to drill for sap and insects. However, references do say that during the winter sapsuckers will join together in small groups.

The diet of a sapsucker is partially how it got its name. Insects, **tree sap**, nuts and fruit represent the major diet of this species; although they will also eat berries, buds and some cambium tissue from trees.

The trees that hold the attention of sapsuckers are Paper Birch, Red Maple, Serviceberry, Aspen, Hickory, Alder, Willow, as well as Pine, Spruce and Fir. Quite an array of trees this species attends to for sustenance!

A great deal of attention has been given to the way sapsuckers feed. It doesn't make sense for an animal to expend a lot of energy exploring for food when a big part of the diet is tree sap and insects drawn to the sap. Consequently, sapsuckers will test out a tree to see if the sap is running by tapping a row of holes near a live branch.

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“When it finds a tree that is photosynthesizing, then it lays down more holes to feed,^[11] about 0.5 centimeters (0.20 in) above the primary bands. These form columns. Each hole is started as an oval elongated horizontally, drilled through the bark and phloem layers to the outside of the xylem. They are then drilled further, with the sapsucker enlarging it vertically, making it yield more sap, but only for a few days.^[14] The top holes in each column thus provides phloem sap.” Quoted from Wikipedia.

Remember from your basic High School Biology, xylem and phloem are the basic transporting cell tissue within a tree and other plants. Xylem transports water from the roots to the leaves. Phloem transports sugar made from photosynthesis to stems and back down to roots for storage or to be used for energy, i.e. growth. It is those nutrients that also provides sustenance for the sapsucker.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Coywolves – chorus, pups
Red Fox – individual seen running.

Meadow Vole – individual
Gray Squirrel – feeding under feeders

Weather Tidbits

Month of APRIL 1-30, 2020

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 62.6 mm or 2.5 inches. Average precipitation for April is 2.83, or 0.33 inches below average.

Overcast Days: 6