

Yellow Bellied Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus varius

General Information:

-The eastern counterpart of the Red-naped Sapsucker, this is the most widespread of the four North American sapsuckers. In breeding season, the male and female perform continual loud drumming duets, including a ritual of tapping at the nest entrance. The female is similar to the male but has a white throat. In flight the birds show a white rump and white shoulder patches. Juveniles have brown mottling on the chest, head, and upper-parts, and a white shoulder patch but lack the bright head and throat color.

Song:

-Although it is often silent, it can have a low, growling nasal mew sound that is somewhat catlike. Alarm calls of *cheee-er; cheee-er*. During courtship, may display cries of *hoih-hoih*. Males make staccato drumming sounds.

Behavior:

-Are either solitary or in pairs. Bores series of small holes, often in horizontal rows, in trees to drink the sap that collects. Eats insects attracted to drill wells, plus fruits, berries, and tree buds. It will guard its wells from other birds, including hummingbirds, and small mammals. Nests in soft deciduous trees, often near water.



Breeding:

-Monogamous or in small and very loose colonies.

Nesting:

-Incubation 12-13 days by both sexes (male at night and female during the day). The 1 brood per year of altricial young stay in nest 25-29 days where they are fed a mixture of sap and insects by both sexes. The young are taught the time-honored art of sap-sucking by both sexes.

Population:

-Common to fairly common in deciduous and mixed forests. Accidental to rare in West during migration and winter.

Conservation:

-People dislike the drill wells created in their shade and fruit trees; fearing the tree will be injured or diseased, they often kill sapsuckers, although the birds are protected by law.

Shoreline Restoration Issues:

-To create an environmental friendly to the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker, plant a wide array of deciduous and coniferous trees along with shrubs such as Winterberry, High-bush Cranberry, Snowberry, and Nannyberry. Good trees for this bird include Cottonwood, Black Willow, Basswood, Eastern White Pine, Red Pine, Trembling Aspen, Shagbark Hickory, Paper Birch, Yellow Birch, and River Birch. Also hang out suet balls or old sweets in the winter.