

*BIOLOGY, LEGAL STATUS, CONTROL MATERIALS AND
DIRECTIONS FOR USE*

Red-breasted Sapsuckers

Sphyrapicus varius

Family: Picidae



Introduction: The red-breasted sapsucker was historically shot as an orchard pest but is now protected. It is an inhabitant of coniferous forests of the northern Pacific Coast, usually found at middle or lower elevations.



Identification: Generally about 8 to 9 inches, the red-breasted sapsucker is a medium-sized woodpecker. It has a red head and breast with white stripe running up side. There is a black spot in front of its eyes and white line from nostril onto its face. Its back is black with a variable amount of white or yellow spots. Belly is yellowish, wings are black with some white spotting. The tail is barred black and white in the middle and outermost feathers, black on sides. Its bill is black and rump is white. Further information is available at:

[Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)



Legal Status: Sapsuckers are listed as migratory nongame birds in the [U.S. Code of Federal Regulations](#). They may be controlled only under permit from the [U.S. Fish](#)

[and Wildlife Service.](#) No permit is required to scare or herd sapsuckers.



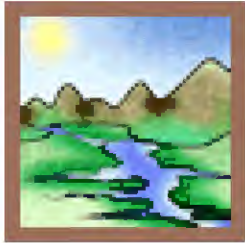
Damage: Sapsuckers are specialized woodpeckers that excavate numerous rows of square shaped holes around the circumference of the bole and larger limbs of many species of trees and shrubs, including evergreens. Sap flows into these pits and the sapsuckers lick it up with their brush-tipped tongues and eat insects attracted to the exudation. Individual trees attacked year after year suffer from lowered vitality and are exposed to injury by insects and disease. Occasionally, a tree is completely girdled and dies. Damage most often occurs on ornamental yard trees, but in

wintering areas and during migration, sapsuckers sometimes congregate in orchards and vineyards, and cause significant damage.



Range: Summer range includes breeding from southern Alaska to central California, eastward to eastern British Columbia and eastern California. During the winter the red-breasted sapsucker is found from southern British Columbia through California to Baja Mexico.

[Red-breasted Sapsucker](#)



Habitat: Red-breasted sapsuckers breed primarily in coniferous forests, but also use deciduous and riparian habitat, as well as orchards and power line cuts. They winter in a variety of forested habitats.



Biology: The red-breasted sapsucker forages for insects by gleaning, probing, prying, tapping, and catching them on the fly. It drills a series of shallow holes in bark of trees, and licks up sap. It also feeds on fruit and insects. It nests in the cavities of dead trees or dead branches. No nest material is added to the cavity. Eggs are white and clutch size is four to seven eggs.



Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Exclusion: Good protection from sapsuckers are barriers of hardware cloth, plastic or burlap, loosely wrapped and secured around the injured areas of trees to discourage further damage.

Repellents: Sticky or tacky bird repellents smeared on tree limbs or trunks may discourage pecking.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

Walters, E. L., E. H. Miller, and P. E. Lowther. 2002. Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) and Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*). In The Birds of North America, No. 662 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu>