

BC's Coast Region: Species & Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

Hairy Woodpecker *picoideus* subspecies (*Picoides villosus picoideus*)

Global: G5T3, Provincial: S3 COSEWIC: N/A BC List: Blue, Identified Wildlife



Male (Mainland form)

Notes on *Picoides villosus picoideus* :
A member of the family Picidae (“woodpeckers, piculets, wrynecks”). Approximately a dozen races of Hairy Woodpecker range from the treeline in Alaska across the Prairie provinces, east to Newfoundland, and south to highland forests of Panama and the Bahamas. This familiar, resident woodpecker is most often confused with its smaller relative Downy Woodpecker. The “Queen Charlotte” form is one of five subspecies of the species *villosus* in BC and one of a number of endemic fauna found only on the Haida Gwaii archipelago. Much about its biology is derived from the mainland form.

Description

Length 16-25 cm. Adults are similar in size to American Robin. Males are distinguished from females by the distinct red nape at the back of the head (the nape of females is black). The body, back and area under the wings of both sexes have a coffee stained appearance with the upper parts of the wings and tail black. The outer feathers of the tail are white, barred with black and a patch of white runs down the back. The wings have some white spotting near the shoulder while the lower parts of the flight feathers are barred. The bill is almost as long as the head. The white areas of the body on the Haida Gwaii subspecies is more darkly ‘stained’ with more variability in black barring on the flanks compared to mainland forms. Juveniles of both sexes of Hairy Woodpecker can have a red patch on the crown (versus the nape) which changes to the more characteristic pattern as the bird matures. As with many species of woodpecker the “drumming” used to bore cavities is also used to attract mates during the breeding season. The drumming pattern is loud with a rapid burst of rhythmic taps and a terminal slowdown.

Diet

Hairy Woodpecker are opportunistic foragers exploiting a range of wood-boring beetles (larvae and adults) as well as ants, caterpillars, and other insects. Insect protein makes up over 80% of the total diet. The remaining foods include seasonally available fruits and seeds as well as sap taken by exploiting sapsucker boreholes. Foraging activities are undertaken through various methods such as gleaning, probing, pecking, hammering, tearing away bark, or drilling funnel-shaped holes into bark. Living and dead trees are targeted as are standing large organic debris and downed wood including debris found in clearcuts.

Look's Like?

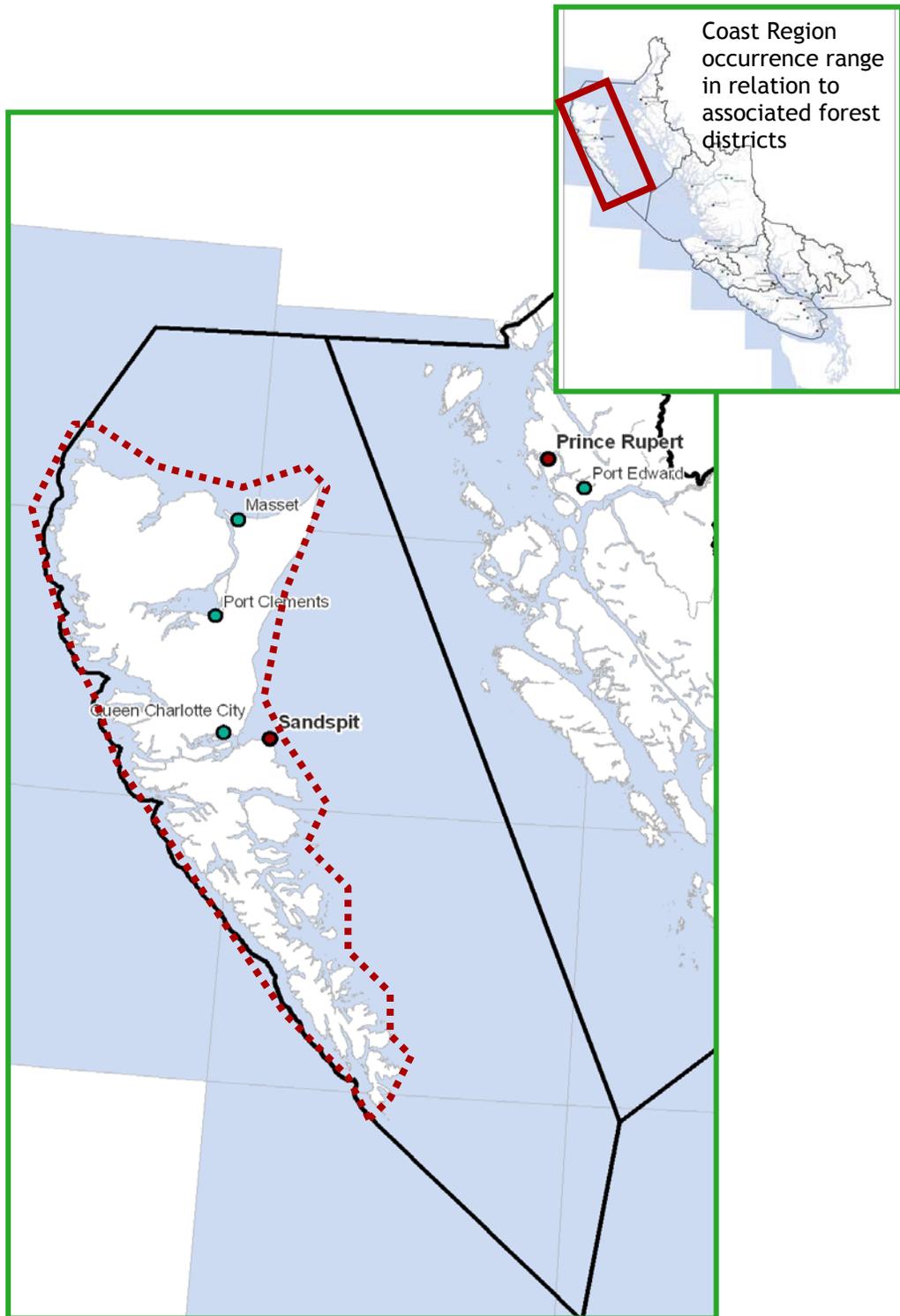
Throughout its North American range Hairy Woodpecker is most often confused with the smaller, shorter-billed Downy Woodpecker, which is absent on Haida Gwaii. The only other woodpecker species on Haida Gwaii are Red-breasted Sapsucker and Northern Flicker, neither of which is likely to be confused with the Hairy Woodpecker subspecies.



Red-breasted Sapsucker

Distribution

Elevation 0-1830 m. This subspecies is known only from the Haida Gwaii archipelago.



Hairy Woodpecker *picoideus* subspecies (on *Picoides villosus picoideus*), known occurrence range for the Coast Region

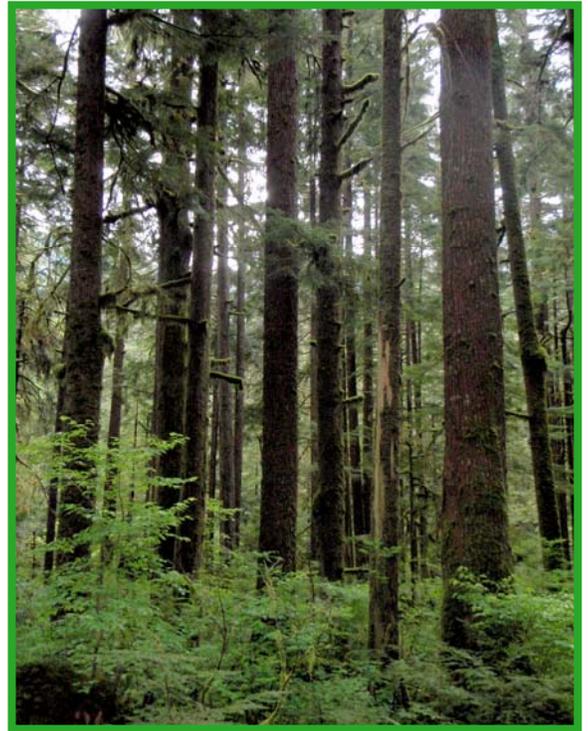
Habitat Preferences

Hairy Woodpecker are often found adjacent to, or at the edges of riparian areas, burns and meadows. The branchless section of the trunk below the crown is the favoured foraging area. Younger fragmented stands of trees including those found in urban forests are utilized in other areas of the Coast Region as are artificial cavity boxes, though it is unknown if the Haida Gwaii subspecies will exploit these features.

Critical Features

Contiguous stands of trees both living and dead, composed of coniferous and or deciduous species preferably of mature age classes with large diameter trees including those >80 cm and on 22% slopes. Nesting and roosting cavities are at least 1 m, but mostly between 2-6 m off the ground in living or dead trees. Nest cavities in conifers are usually in trees infected with heart rot

Coniferous, deciduous or mixed wood stands with mature to old-growth structural stages are preferred. Cavities can be found in both living and dead or dying trees.



Seasonal Life Cycle

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
		Breeding / Nesting									
			Eggs/Chick's in nest								
Fledging and dispersal (non-migratory)					Fledging and dispersal (non-migratory)						

Threats

- ◆ The *picoideus* subspecies of Hairy Woodpecker is highly endemic with limited distribution. Population density and abundance is naturally low leaving this subspecies highly vulnerable to extirpation.
- ◆ Disturbance and loss of critical foraging and nesting features from development and logging are considered one of the most significant threats. Population fluctuations will likely result if clearing occurs without adequate retention of critical features.
- ◆ Potential competition and predation from introduced species such as Raccoon, European Starling and Red Squirrel.

Conservation & Management Objectives

- ◆ Apply conservation and management objectives as set out in the “Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife - Accounts V. 2004. Queen Charlotte Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus picoideus* and reduce impacts to its preferred habitat from introduced species as noted in “Lessons from the Islands Introduced species and what they tell us about how ecosystems work”.
- ◆ Assess, inventory and monitor using methodology setout in the Provincial RISC standards # 19 “Inventory Methods for Woodpeckers” (Version 2.0)

Specific activities should include:

- ◆ Population management is required at the ecosystem level. Logging plans should maintain connectivity between higher elevation summer habitats and lower elevation wintering habitats to maintain feeding, nesting, and roosting habitat as well as opportunities for dispersal. Territories can range from 0.6 to 15 ha with the key factor influencing use being habitat quality. The minimum forest patch size required to support a breeding pair during the nesting season is estimated to be 4 ha while riparian buffers of at least 40 meters should be maintained.
- ◆ For breeding requirements protect or manage with the objective of providing continued cavity nesting sites. While Hairy Woodpecker will reuse cavities from previous years, new ones are generally excavated for each breeding season. Core nesting areas should be identified and associated Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHA's) under FRPA established around them.
- ◆ Assess actual exclusion, competition and predation potential from introduced species (e.g. European Starling, Red Squirrel), especially as settlement expands in the Haida Gwaii Archipelago.
- ◆ Refrain from salvage or thinning of wildlife trees in areas where they occur in significant densities as wildlife trees form a critical component for seasonal foraging and breeding success.

This subspecies of Hairy Woodpecker is subject to protections and prohibitions under the BC Wildlife Act and is Identified Wildlife under the Forest and Range Practices Act. Habitat for this species may also be governed under provincial and federal regulations including the Fish Protection Act and Federal Fisheries Act as well as Regional and local municipal bylaws.

Content for this Factsheet has been derived from the following sources

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Every effort has been made to ensure content accuracy. Comments or corrections should be directed to the South Coast Conservation Program: info@sccp.ca. Content updated August 2010.

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