

Tap, tap, tap, the Downy Woodpecker is at work

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Walk along the Apple Capital Loop Trail in Wenatchee and listen carefully as you pass the tall cottonwoods near the Wenatchee Row and Paddle Club boathouse.

You may hear the short, whinnying song or the tapping sound of a Downy Woodpecker.

With luck, you'll see the bird as it pecks away at the tree to loosen insects. Don't you wonder how a bird can withstand such fast and strong blows to its skull?

The Downy Woodpecker is one of two small woodpeckers we see in the trees and shrubs of north central Washington.

The other is the Hairy Woodpecker.

These two woodpeckers look remarkably similar. Males have



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



a red patch on the back of the head. Both birds are black and white.

But a trained eye will see differences. Downy Woodpeckers are about three inches shorter than a Hairy Woodpecker. That may not seem like much but if you ever get to see them side-by-side you'll appreciate how much

larger the Hairy is.

The Downy Woodpecker tail feathers are white with a few black spots.

But the easiest way to tell the two birds apart is to study the beak. If you imagine that you pivot the beak toward the back of the head, the Downy's beak will reach the bird's eye; the

Hairy's beak will extend well beyond the eye and may look to touch the back of the head.

Don't give up trying to identify either bird. They are pretty common, announcing themselves with the tapping and hammering noises.

They are pretty small though, so watch carefully. Good luck.