

ADIRONDACK WOODPECKERS IN UNUSUAL PLUMAGES

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During the summer of 1981, Chris Spies and I observed a brown-and-black Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*). The brown replaced all areas that were normally white in this species. The size suggested that it was not one of smaller brown subspecies.

In the early 1970's, Robert Smart, Ted Dittrich and myself observed a Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) with a yellow crown patch. I am aware that Hairy Woodpeckers sometimes have a yellow crown patch, but I have seen no reference to this occurring in Downy Woodpeckers.

One summer in northern Herkimer County, Chris Spies and I observed a Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) with the feathers of the lower back so worn that the quills were showing. We observed this very clearly but realized that in conditions less ideal, the bird could very easily have been mistaken for a Three-toed Woodpecker (*P. tridactylus*). We theorized that the excessive feather wear was due to nesting activities.

The race of the Three-toed Woodpecker that occurs in the Adirondacks is *P. tridactylus bacatus*. Its plumage is so varied that I don't believe I have ever seen two alike. I have seen some individuals with no white on the back and but a few white flecks on the rump. The National Museum of Canada has a specimen of this race, that is totally blackish on the back and rump. I have also seen one individual that had brown barring on the back. This sighting was in the month of November. One July I saw a bird that had mouse-gray barring on its back. In general I find that well-barred backs are far less common in *bacatus* than backs that are flecked with white.

In the summer of 1981, Spies and I observed a pair of Three-toed Woodpeckers digging a nest hole. At first the yellow-crowned male was digging. The female arrived and began digging as soon as the male left and she had a gray crown patch. Both male and female juveniles may have crown patches, but this was a female of breeding age as evidenced by the fact that the pair nested successfully.

Below is a summation of various plumages observed in *P. tridactylus bacatus*.

1. The back may be totally blackish to strongly flecked with white along the center line of the back, or any degree of marking between these two extremes.

2. Instead of **flecking** as described above, the back may be **barred**, with the same degree of variation as described above.

3. Barring on the back is usually white, but may be mouse-gray or brown.

4. The white stripe behind the eye may be lacking or may extend across the side of the head, down the nape and the center of the upper back or to any length between these extremes.

5. The crown patch, although usually yellow with dark streaks, may be clear yellow, and rarely gray.

6. The crown patch is usually elongated but may sometimes be round as in *P. arcticus*.

7. Adult females may show a gray crown patch.

I have been observing both the Three-toed Woodpecker and the Black-backed Woodpecker for the past fourteen years. All of the above observations were made in the Adirondacks. Both species are easily approached in the field, making good observations possible.

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