

**HAIRY WOODPECKERS (*Picoides villosus*) FEED DOWNY WOODPECKER
(*P. pubescens*) NESTLINGS**

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Many instances of interspecific feeding in birds have been reported, and several explanations have been proposed (e.g., Shy 1982). A proximate cause that has received little emphasis is human disturbance. In this note, I relate a series of interspecific feeding incidents with Hairy (*Picoides villosus*) and Downy (*P. pubescens*) woodpeckers, and suggest that human disturbance caused the behavior.

On 24 March 1992, Mike Bessert discovered a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers excavating a cavity about 8 m above the ground in a slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*) snag in scrubby flatwoods habitat at Archbold Biological Station, Highlands County, Florida. As part of a demographic study, both adult woodpeckers had been color-banded in previous years and were readily identifiable from their color bands. On 8 May 1992, I color-banded their three nestlings, two females with black crowns and one male with a red-orange crown patch. While I was at the nest, both adults returned with food, but could not feed the nestlings due to my presence. Both adults eventually flew to a Downy Woodpecker nest that was about 30 m away. The cavity of the Downy nest was approximately the same height as the Hairy nest, was also in a slash pine snag, and was visible from the Hairy nest. The Downy Woodpecker nest contained at least two nestlings close to fledging (i.e., a nestling head protruded from the cavity entrance when being fed) and the nestlings begged loudly and nearly continuously. First the male Hairy Woodpecker and then the female fed at least one of the Downy Woodpecker nestlings before departing the area.

I monitored the Hairy Woodpecker nest before and after the nestlings were banded from a vantage point that allowed an unobstructed view of both woodpecker nests. On 5 May 1992, during a brief visit to determine the age of the nestlings, I watched as the female flew to the nest with a billful of insects. She fed the young while she was perched outside the cavity, indicating that the nestlings would soon fledge (Jackson 1976). On 7 May, I watched the nest for 131 min, from 0744 to 0955 DST. During this time, the female fed the Hairy young eight times (at 0746, 0810, 0823, 0841, 0918, 0929, 0936, and 0950), and the male fed them three times (at 0750, 0841, and 0932).

No nest watch was conducted on 8 May prior to banding, but I briefly checked the nest 45 min after the young were returned to it. At that time, the nestling male was looking out from the cavity, and was soon fed by the breeding male.

On 9 May, I watched the nest for 132 min, from 0915 to 1127. The breeding male fed the nestling male four times (at 0924, 0929, 0949, and 1021). The female flew into the area with food seven times (at 0915, 1015, 1059, 1106, 1114, 1119, and 1125). On four of these occasions, she fed the Downy Woodpecker nestlings, and attempted to feed them during two other visits but was repelled by the female Downy Woodpecker. During her final visit while I was watching the nest, the female Hairy Woodpecker flew to the Downy Woodpecker nest tree, but I chased her away to try to induce her to resume feeding her own young. After 1 min, the female flew to her nest and fed the nestling male.

On 10 May, I watched the Hairy Woodpecker nest for 171 min, from 0832 to 1123. The breeding male fed the nestling male three times (at 0910, 0922, and 0932). The

breeding female visited the area three times (at 0843, 0941, and 1056). At 0843, she flew to the Downy Woodpecker nest, but I chased her away. The female then spotted another Hairy Woodpecker, which she repelled from the area. She fed no young during this visit. The female returned at 0941, and remained until 1016. She flew to the Downy Woodpecker nest seven times. I chased her away at 0941, 1010, and 1014, and the female Downy Woodpecker repelled her at 0949, 0951, 0954, and 0957. Again, she fed no young. At 1056, the female returned with food. She flew to the Downy Woodpecker nest, but I chased her away. After 10 min, she flew back to the nest, but was repelled by the female Downy Woodpecker. At 1116, while the nestling male Hairy Woodpecker was calling loudly from the entrance of its nest cavity, the female Hairy Woodpecker fed the Downy Woodpecker young, then departed.

On 11 May, I examined the two woodpecker nests from the ground and both appeared to be empty. At 1122, I found the breeding male Hairy Woodpecker and the recently fledged male about 50 m south of the nest tree. On 21 May, both female Hairy Woodpecker fledglings accompanied a parent about 1 km south of the nest (R. Mumme pers. comm.). The final observation of a young Hairy Woodpecker from this nest was on 5 June, when I observed the fledgling male with the breeding female about 1.5 km south of the nest.

Shy (1982) summarized 140 cases of interspecific feeding among birds, and listed their probable causes. She grouped the causes into eight categories: mixed clutches; original nest or brood destroyed; close nesting by two species; young birds calling as a stimulus; orphaned young; male feeding another species while his mate was incubating; unmated birds; and miscellaneous. The miscellaneous category contained the largest number of entries, 41 (not 40 as in Shy 1982: Table 2).

My observations of a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers feeding Downy Woodpecker nestlings fall into two of Shy's (1982) categories: (1) close nesting by two species; and (2) young birds calling as a stimulus. However, I feel it was human disturbance that caused the Hairy Woodpecker parents to feed the Downy Woodpecker nestlings. Shy (1982) does not mention human disturbance as a probable cause of interspecific feeding. Among hundreds of references on the effects of human disturbance on birds, few references relate to interspecific feeding. Allen (1930 in Williams 1942), wrote of a brood of American Redstarts (*Setophaga ruticilla*) that had been removed from their nest and placed in the hands of Allen's children to be photographed. The male redstart continued to feed the young, but the female, "restrained by fear," instead fed nestling American Robins in a nearby nest. An alternative explanation for the Hairy Woodpecker adults feeding the Downy Woodpecker nestlings could be displacement behavior or redirected behavior due to disturbance at the nest (J. Jackson in litt.).

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