

The Hairy Woodpecker

Picoides villosus

By Aiden Krebs-Elaschuk and Chad Nichol

Distribution: Native to North America.¹

Diet: Consumes seeds, berries, larvae, insects, spiders, and other arthropods it finds on the surface or subsurface of trees.²

Home: Nest in self-excavated cavities of dead or rotting trees.³

Description: Black spots on white plumage with males also having a tuft of red feathers on their heads. With sexes being the same size,² they have an average length of 25 cm - 38 cm.¹

Watch out! Sometimes confused with the smaller, downy woodpecker.



Figure 1. Image of a hairy woodpecker (Left) and downy woodpecker (Right). Photo Credit: Marie Read.

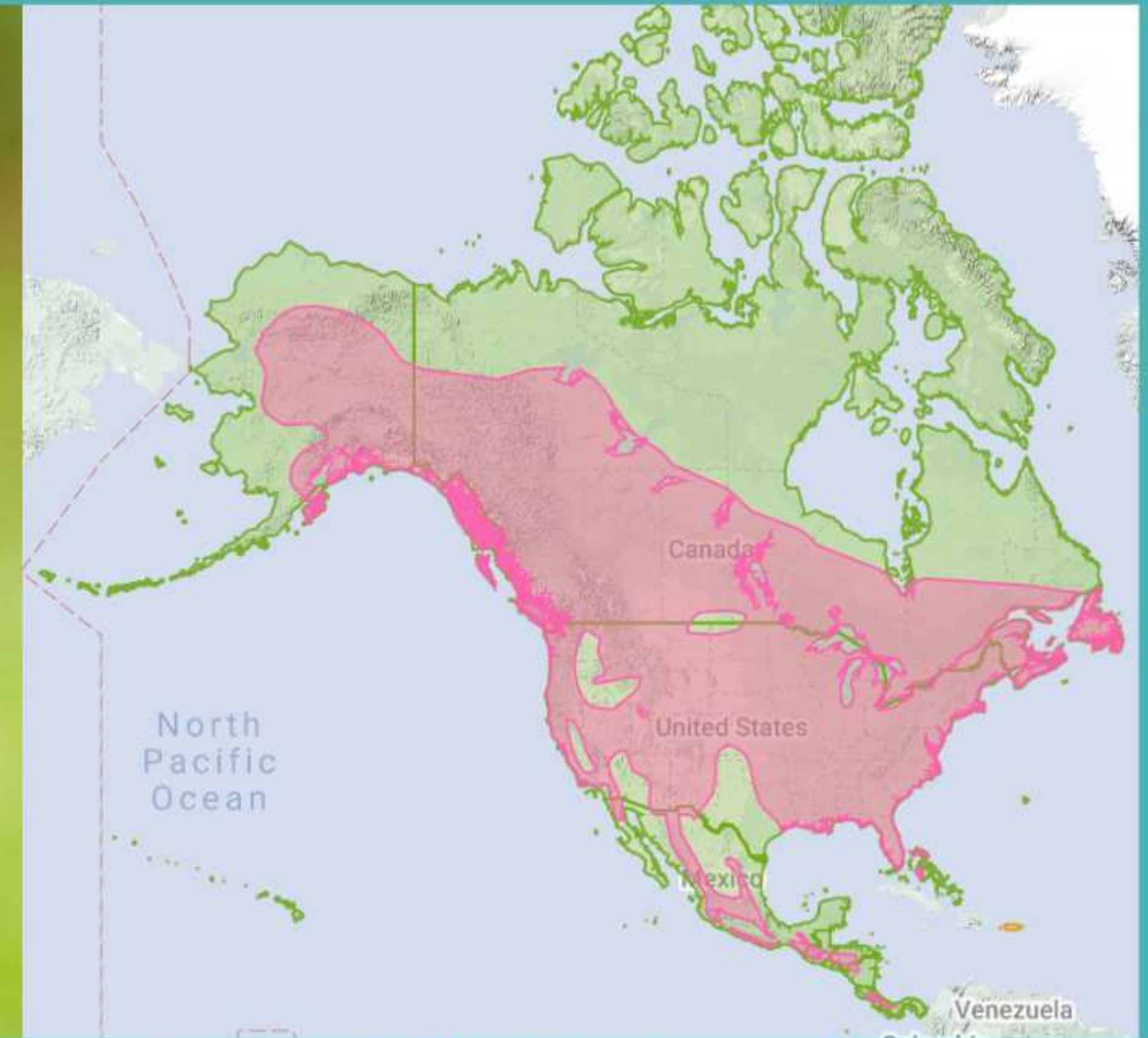


Figure 2: Distribution of hairy woodpecker.¹

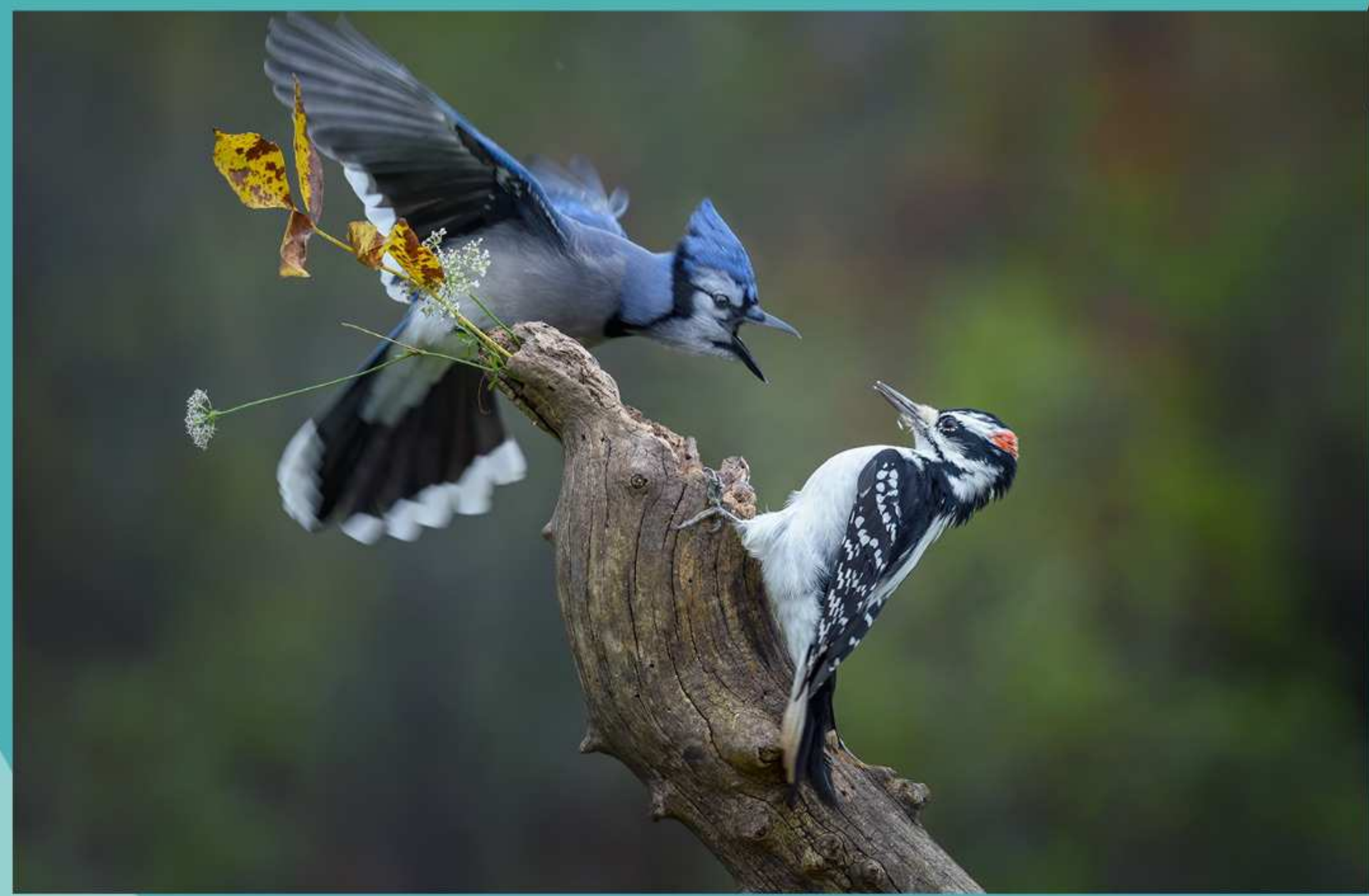


Figure 2. Image of tense interaction between a hairy woodpecker and blue jay. Photo Credit: Alexander BB.

Competition

Who: Often aggressive to other bird species such as the northern shrike,⁴ downy woodpecker,⁵ and european starling.⁶

Birds fighting for nesting holes is common:⁴

- European starlings have been known to enter and destroy hairy woodpecker nest-cavities and eggs.⁶

Strange! Commensalism is also observed between the hairy woodpecker and the european starling.

- Female european starlings provide unwanted maternal care to the nestlings of the hairy woodpecker when their real mother is away.⁷

Commensalism

Pileated woodpecker: Strong and easily create large foraging holes in the tree when looking for food.⁸

Hairy woodpecker: Utilizes an abandoned pileated woodpecker's hole to burrow further into the tree than it would otherwise be unable to and benefit from the further abundance of larvae.⁸



Figure 3. Image of hairy woodpecker entering their nest. Photo Credit: Miles & Teresa Tuffli.

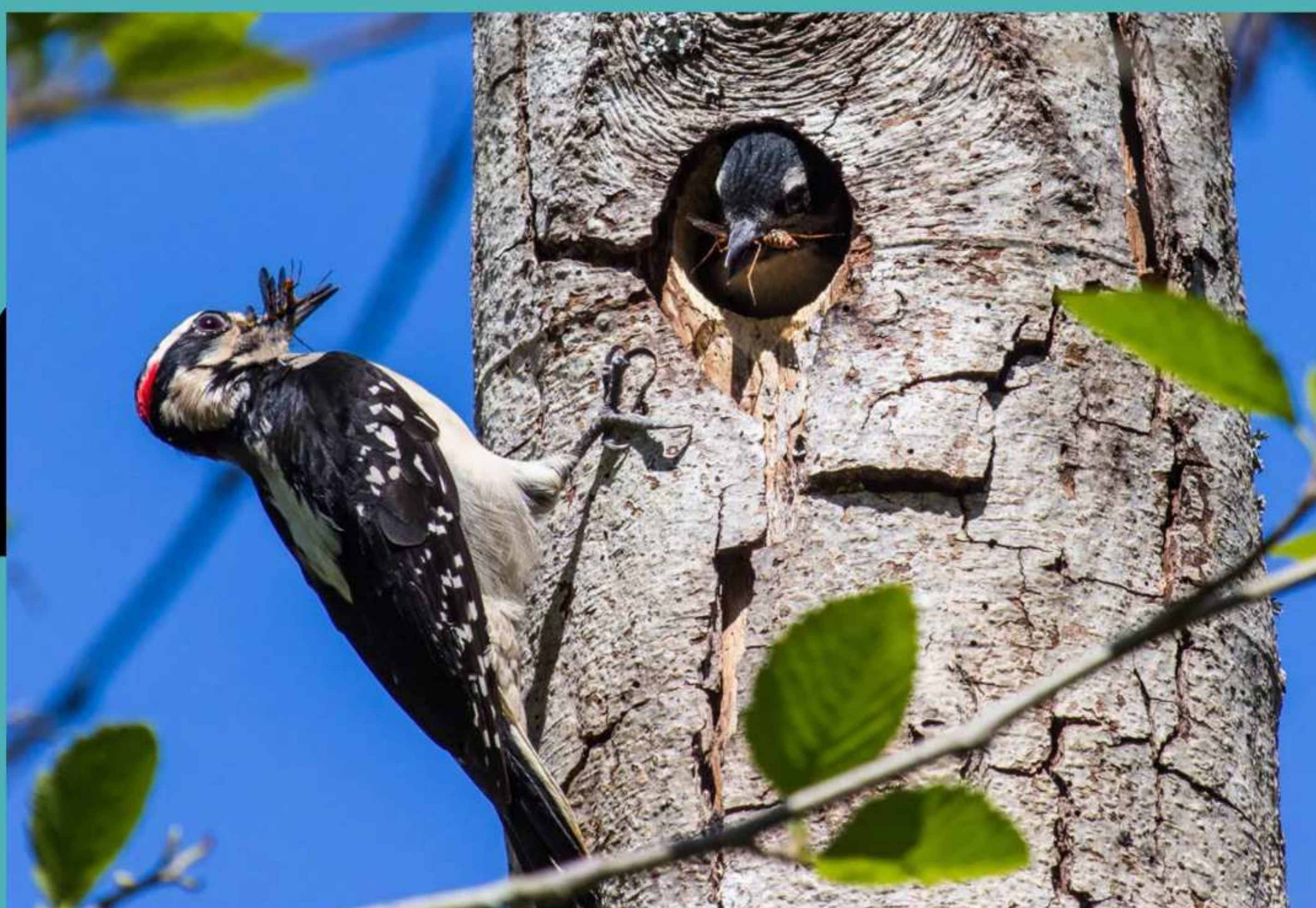


Figure 4. Image of hairy woodpecker feeding its young from food it foraged for. Photo Credit: Andrew Reding.

Predation

Locating: Via percussing its beak against a tree, they hear if the wood is hollow – indicating a prey tunnel – or if the prey moves inside the bark.⁹

Chiselling and Pecking: Upon locating an arthropod tunnel, they begin to chisel and peck the tree,⁹ digging a narrow hole up to 5 cm deep.²

Extraction: Specialized rapid-darting and vibrating of their tongues catches the arthropods from inside their tunnels.⁹

Abundant prey: The dead trees that the hairy woodpecker forages in are very abundant in prey.³

