

Hairy, Furry and Feathered By Cindy Williams

Raise your hand if you can tell the difference between a Hairy Woodpecker and a Downy Woodpecker. I can assure you that my hands did not come off the keyboard. I understand that size (the Hairy is larger) and bill shape (the Hairy beak is long, almost as long as his head, while the Downy is shorter at only about 1/3 the length of his head) are telltale clues. Those things are easy to differentiate if they are side by side but not so easy to tell when they are on your birdfeeder. I like what WikiHow has to say: "...the Downy is roughly the same size as a House Sparrow, while the Hairy is similar in size to a Robin." That might make it a little easier to decide which one you're seeing. I'm not even going to get into the color pattern changes since they are both black and white with red patches and quite similar.



At any rate, it's very easy for me to know who is who when I show up at Lakeside for a volunteer shift – they write it right on the paperwork! This Hairy Woodpecker came to us from Lee's Summit after having the misfortune of tangling with a cat (the main danger to songbirds in North America, killing about 4 million birds a day or 1 billion per year). Want to see more songbirds around? Keep your cat indoors or at least put a bell around its neck. And make sure all pets are spayed and neutered so they are not out creating more unwanted pets that are preying on area songbirds. This one was lucky enough not to have received any apparent puncture wounds but he got a round of antibiotics just in case – it's almost a guarantee that any animal with a cat bite will get an infection. His wing was a bit droopy but didn't appear to be broken. We'll have him on antibiotics for a week then move him to our outdoor aviary and assuming he flies well he'll be out of here in no time.

Hairy Woodpeckers are not at all uncommon to our area, though their numbers are down due to habitat loss. They can live pretty much anywhere big trees are available. They spend much of their time hanging onto the side of trees and looking for bugs, often tearing off the bark and pecking into a dead tree to find them – like all Woodpeckers they have evolved a very strong bill for that purpose along with a cranial structure that helps to absorb the blows and dissipate the energy throughout the body rather than just the head. If you want a more complete explanation of how that works, check out the Wikipedia entry on woodpeckers at <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodpecker> (or just Google Woodpeckers). They also have developed specialized feet which help in traversing up and down the trunks of trees. They are fascinating creatures and fun to watch. I love running across them in the wild and have been known to keep dead trees in my yard just to make sure they have a place to call home. If you want to attract more of them hang some suet in addition to your regular birdseed, although I have to say I see quite a few at my birdfeeder without the suet. Hint – they like peanuts and sunflower seeds too. They are permanent (i.e. non-migratory) birds so they would probably especially appreciate an assist with some food in the winter.

Speaking of cats in the wild (ok, that was a paragraph ago but it helps me transition to the next animal), Bobcats are common throughout the continental US and parts of Canada and Mexico. This one hails from Independence and came in dragging her right rear leg, with an abrasion on the left side of her jaw. Upon examination (which required sedation because she had really



perked up since she was found) it was determined that there were no breaks, no tooth fractures and that she is a first-year cat, meaning that she just finished her kittenhood (I may have made that word up) and is well on her way to being a full adult. She got some subcutaneous fluid, some pain and inflammation medication and lots of food. She got very sassy very fast so she was moved to an outdoor pen as soon as possible to prevent stress. Her leg rebounded quickly and she's now back in the wilds of Independence, catching mice and rabbits and other small rodents. Isn't she beautiful?

One other natural beauty that came to us in much worse shape was this Golden Eagle. A game warden in McFall (north and east of Kansas City) picked up what he thought



was a juvenile Bald Eagle that had potentially been zapped by some power lines (she was under some, beside a road) and was able to find transportation to Lakeside for her the next day. She was very thin with blood in her mouth and nares (nose) and was pretty lethargic. There were no breaks or obvious injuries (other than the blood) so she could have been hit by a car but the staff suspected lead poisoning. Luckily we recently were able to purchase a lead poison testing kit thanks to generous donations to Friends of Lakeside Nature Center and it confirmed an advanced case of lead poisoning. She was immediately put on the proper protocol and seemed to be rebounding the first few days but the damage had been done and she didn't make it.

Flint, Michigan has recently brought lead poisoning into the national consciousness. For decades lead was used in paint, gasoline and pipes, exposing all of us to the potential risks associated with the ingestion of heavy metals (which includes damage to the nervous and reproductive systems). Over the years these exposures became illegal in the US and in 1991 the US Fish and Wildlife Service banned toxic lead-based shot use when hunting waterfowl. But a major source of lead toxicity in birds such as Eagles continues to be from lead shot and lead sinkers used in fishing. Eagles who eat the carcass of a deer killed by lead shot, or a goose that mistook lead shot on the ground for seed, or a duck that swallowed a lead sinker become sicker and sicker and ultimately die. They are very difficult to treat since they are usually not found until their nervous systems are compromised (if they are found at all). It's a serious problem for our majestic national symbols. Switching to non-lead-based bullets and fishing tackle will go a long way toward helping solve the problem.

With spring right around the corner it's nice to be able to share some of the more interesting adult animals that come our way. Soon we'll be awash in babies (the first ones have already arrived) and the Center and home rehabbers alike will be hopping (no pun intended). Please don't forget to do your part to keep any babies you might come across with their parents if at all possible – Lakeside should be a last resort as we are not a good substitute for mom even in a world with loose cats (pet, feral or wild), dogs, cars and humans running around. Always call the Center for any advice and thanks for being a friend of wildlife!

