

## **An Article About Woodpeckers**

### **Dear Friends, Neighbors and Customers**

This letter is about woodpeckers.

Specifically Red Headed Woodpeckers that live on the Snake River Farm.

I have attached a photo of a Red Headed Woodpecker. Not great resolution but I think you will get the picture.

This woodpecker is not common in central Minnesota. In fact, most people have never seen one.

We have several families of them every summer for the past 15 years.

A favorite habitat of Red Headed Woodpeckers is dead Elm trees.

Dutch Elm disease killed most of the Elm trees in central Minnesota about 40 years ago.

Since then Elm trees continue to sprout as seedlings and to grow as young trees. When they reach between 12 and 20 inches in diameter, the Elms succumb to Dutch Elm Disease.

It is a pity. Many of you are too young to remember the majestic elm trees that grew everywhere in central and southern Minnesota.

Until they reach 36 to 48 inches in diameter, elms are a normal shaped tree. When they reach their full size, they have a way of spreading their gigantic limbs in the classic shape of an enormous shade tree.

I have noticed a few Elms getting larger and larger before they die. I assume that means they are being selected by nature for resistance to the disease.

Perhaps in a few more centuries enormous Elms will populate Minnesota again.

When the Elms die, they continue to stand for ten years or more.

Dead elms seldom fall but rather are slowly dismembered over time.

Most trees of other species fall within a few years after they die.

Birch rot quickly because their water resistant bark holds moisture in. That accelerates decay. The same trait that makes them great for canoes makes them rot quickly.

Oaks tend to rot just below the ground. Because of that, a dead oak is a real hazard and may drop unexpectedly in a terrific crash.

Elms have a unique way of recycling themselves.

In the first year or two after death, the small limbs fall. Then gradually the larger diameter limbs then finally after about ten years the trunk is all that remains. Still standing straight.

The Red Headed Woodpeckers find food and make nests in these decaying upright elms.

If you have dead Elms and can leave them stand safely, do so.

You may attract these beautiful woodpeckers.

I have also attached photos of a Red Bellied woodpecker, which people sometimes call red headed because it also has a red head.

Almost all woodpeckers have some red on their heads.

There is a photo attached of a Pileated Woodpecker. The Pileated is the size of a crow.

There is also a not very good photo that shows a Hairy and Downy woodpecker together.

The photo does show the size difference.

The Hairy and Downy have almost identical markings but the Hairy is twice as large as the Downy.

All five of these woodpeckers are here daily in the summer.

There is one other woodpecker on the Farm, the Flicker.

I do not have a photo handy.

The Flicker has the unique and characteristic undulating flight of a woodpecker but it spends so much time on the ground that most people may not recognize it as a woodpecker.

We see the Yellow Bellied Sapsucker only occasionally.

Best regards.  
Tom