

Facts at a Glance

TYPE OF ANIMAL

Avian/Bird

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Melanerpes carolinus

FOUND WHERE

Mostly found in South-Eastern United States

HEIGHT

9.4 in. (24 cm)

WEIGHT

Averages 2 – 3.2 oz.
(56 – 91 g)

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern



This beautiful woodpecker is easily identified by its rolling calls and red marking on the head and underside. Despite its name, its red belly is harder to distinguish in flight than the head coloring and wing markings. These birds are primarily a south-eastern species. However, they have become more common in Northern areas like Massachusetts in the past decade. They are highly adaptable, medium sized birds that can even adjust to life in the suburbs and city parks. They are generally pale in color, but their sleek, red rounded head and bold black-and-white wings make them stand out to birders as they fly.

HABITAT

Like many woodpeckers, the red-bellied woodpecker feels most at home in forested habitats. Though often found in older, more mature forests, they can survive in various forested landscapes, including urban woods, riparian forests, and wetlands or swamp woods. They prefer nesting in dead standing trees, commonly called snags. Leaving old growth like this in yards and woods provides a good home.

DIET

People commonly think of these birds as carnivorous. However, they are actually omnivores – meaning they eat meat and vegetation. In most cases, woodpeckers will eat a variety of insects. They do so by drilling holes into hollow trees with their beaks, providing their namesake. They may also eat acorns, nuts, fruits, seeds, and occasionally small frogs, eggs, or even fish.

LIFE & BEHAVIOUR

Red-bellied woodpeckers are solitary birds that are typically active in the daytime hours. They do not migrate and will typically pick and defend a territory year-round. They will only socialize during mating season. These birds are thought to be monogamous and will spend the season together, both parents raising and feeding chicks for about 10 weeks until fully grown.

When not feeding or caring for young, red-bellied woodpeckers of any age have been seen playing. They enjoy dodging and ducking through trees.

FUN FACT

Red-bellied woodpeckers use a variety of movements besides flight, including walking, climbing, and a unique form called “hitching” where they hop upward along tree sides or vertical facings.