

# the NATURALIST CORNER

Brought to you by Peggy Potts  
Coastal Master Naturalist  
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As a graduate of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, I would like to share my excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, I will share my observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

I also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing me, Peggy Potts, at [ppotts@charlestoncounty.org](mailto:ppotts@charlestoncounty.org).

## Let the Drums Begin! Woodpeckers and the Many Varieties



When you're outside or in the woods do you ever hear the rapid drumming of a woodpecker? There are quite a few varieties in South Carolina. Some include: The Pileated Woodpecker; the Northern Flicker; the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; the Red-headed Woodpecker; the Downy Woodpecker; the Hairy Woodpecker; and, the threatened Red-cockaded Woodpecker. The Downy Woodpecker is the smallest of the group at around 5 to 7 inches and the Pileated Woodpecker is the largest at 16 to 17 inches.

Many of these birds can be seen from time to time at backyard feeders if they contain black-oiled sunflower seeds or suet. But we mostly hear and see woodpeckers drumming on trees looking for insects to eat. They also eat nuts and fruit. Their habitat is primarily forested areas with the many trees that provide food, shelter, and



nesting sites. The Red-cockaded Woodpeckers live only in mature pine forests, such as the Francis Marion Forest, where long leaf pines are making a come back, thanks to conservation efforts. Both the male and female help to create cavities in trees to build nests. They work as a team and when the eggs hatch, one parent looks for food while the other guards the nest.

As you can imagine woodpeckers have strong pointed beaks that serve as their tool to chisel out crevices for nesting and to find insects. They also have very long tongues that are sticky which help them catch the insects. While most birds have one toe pointed backward and three in front, woodpeckers have two sharp toes that point in each direction allowing them to hang on the sides of trees. Their tail feathers are extra stiff so they can press against the tree for support.



Threats to woodpeckers include, loss of habitat, climate change, and natural disasters such as hurricanes and pine beetle outbreaks that destroy the trees. Protecting the Francis Marion National Forest is one way to protect woodpeckers and other animals that reside there, especially the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. For more information about the Francis Marion National Forest and ways you can help with conservation, visit the Forest Service website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs>.

To hear the podcast of this article go to [charlestoncountygreenbelt.org](http://charlestoncountygreenbelt.org) under "Resources"

### Charleston County Greenbelt Program

The Francis Marion National Forest is a wonderful place to spot woodpeckers. The Greenbelt Program has provided funding for several properties in the Forest. For a list of all greenbelt properties, visit the Greenbelt website at <http://charlestoncountygreenbelt.org> and follow us on Instagram and the County's Facebook page. Don't forget you can earn "Lifestyle Loot" through the Wellness Program when you visit a Greenbelt site and post pictures using #ccgreenbelt.