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Juvenal Plumages of *Picoides* Woodpeckers

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This paper was stimulated by the report (Baumgartner, 1986) of a Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) in "aberrant plumage." The bird described by Baumgartner, essentially a Downy Woodpecker with red-tipped crown feathers and buff, lightly spotted sides, fits reasonably well the description of the typical juvenal plumage of this species. Bent (1939), James (1987) and Parkes (1987) have described this plumage.

Many birdwatchers and bird banders seem unaware of the striking juvenal plumages of North American *Picoides* woodpeckers. In these species, brightly colored crowns in male juvenal plumage are lost in the moult into first winter plumage. These crown patches may even appear on some or most juvenile females. (There appears to be some variability in this between species.)

Examples of juvenal plumage head patterns for five species of North American *Picoides* woodpeckers are shown in figure 1. The differences between these patterns and those of adults of these species can be seen by examining any good field guide.

There is considerable individual variation in the extent of juvenal head markings, illustrated by two of the birds sketched in figure 1. The Hairy Woodpecker (*P. villosus*), a juvenile male (University of Colorado Museum #4530), has an orange-red crown patch with whitish flecking anteriorly. (Actually these are white bases to orange-tipped feathers.) The Downy Woodpecker, an unsexed juvenile (UCM #6845), has a deep red crown patch with some white flecking along the posterior border.

North American *Picoides* woodpeckers exhibiting this trait to some extent include Hairy, Downy, Red-cockaded (*P. borealis*), Ladder-backed (*P. scalaris*), Nuttall's (*P. nuttalli*), Strickland's (*P. stricklandi*), and White-headed (*P. albolarvatus*) woodpeckers (Bent, 1939). *Picoides* woodpeckers in other parts of the world exhibit this trait as well, e.g., the Great-spotted Woodpecker (*P. major*) of Eurasia (Heinzel et al., 1972).

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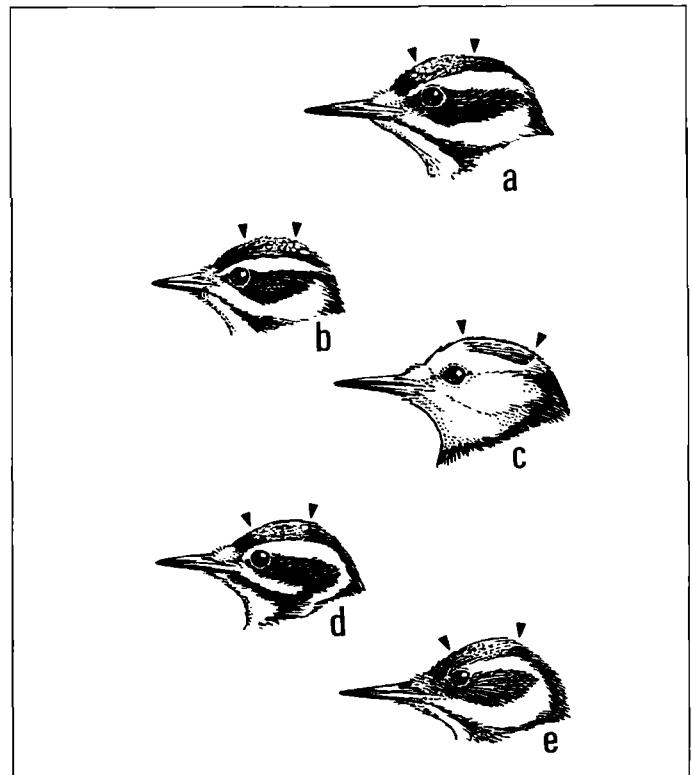


Figure 1. Juvenal plumage head patterns of: (a) Hairy, (b) Downy, (c) White-headed, (d) Nuttall's and (e) Strickland's woodpeckers. Arrows (▼) indicate the anterior and posterior boundaries of the red crown patch on each bird. (Sketch by Tim Manolis.)