The female differs only in having the tints somewhat fainter, the white markings on the back smaller, and the yellow of the lower parts duller.

Length to end of tail $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches; bill along the ridge $\frac{11}{12}$; wing from flexure $5\frac{2}{12}$; tail $3\frac{7}{12}$.

THE YELLOW-BELLIED WOODPECKER.

+PICUS VARIUS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCLXVII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

This beautiful species returns to Louisiana and the other Southern States about the beginning of October. It remains there during the winter, and takes its departure before the beginning of April, after which period I have never observed it in these districts. It is seen in Kentucky, and a few breed there; but the greater number return to the middle and especially the northern parts of the Union. During the winter months, it associates with the Hairy, the Red-bellied, and the Downy Woodpeckers. Its notes, which are extremely plaintive, differ widely from those of any other species, and are heard at a considerable distance in the woods.

The Yellow-bellied Woodpecker prefers the interior of the forest during spring and summer, seldom shewing itself near the habitations of man at those seasons. It is a sly and suspicious bird, spending most of its time in trees which have close branches and dense foliage. It generally bores its nest at a considerable height, and usually in the trunk of an undecayed tree, immediately beneath a large branch, and on its southern side. The hole is worked out by the male as well as the female, in the manner followed by other species, and to the depth of from fifteen to twenty-four inches. The aperture is just large enough to admit the birds, but the hole widens gradually towards the bottom, where it is large and roomy. The eggs, which are from four to six, and pure white, with a slight blush, are deposited on the chips without any nest. The young seldom leave the hole until they are fully fledged, after which they follow their parents, in a straggling manner, until the approach of spring, when the males become shy towards each other, and quarrel whenever they meet, frequently erecting the feathers of the head and fighting desperately.

They fly through the woods with rapidity, in short undulations, seldom going farther at a time than from one tree to another. I never observed one of these birds on the ground. Their food consists of wood-worms and beetles, to which they add small grapes and various berries during autumn and winter, frequently hanging head downwards at the extremity of a bunch of grapes, or such berries as those you see represented in the Plate.

I found this species extremely abundant in the upper parts of the State of Maine, and in the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, but saw none in Newfoundland or Labrador.

While travelling I observed that they performed their migration by day, in loose parties or families of six or seven individuals, flying at a great height, and at the intervals between their sailings and the flappings of their wings, emitting their remarkable plaintive cries. When alighting towards sunset, they descended with amazing speed in a tortuous manner, and first settled on the tops of the highest trees, where they remained perfectly silent for awhile, after which they betook themselves to the central parts of the thickest trees, and searched along the trunks for abandoned holes of Squirrels or Woodpeckers, in which they spent the night, several together in the same hole. On one occasion, while I was watching their movements at a late hour, I was much surprised to see a pair of them disputing the entrance of a hole with an Owl (*Strix asio*), which for nearly a quarter of an hour tried, but in vain, to drive them away from its retreat. The Owl alighted sidewise on the tree under its hole, swelled out its plumage, blew and hissed with all its might; but the two Woodpeckers so guarded the entrance with their sharp bills, their eyes flushed, and the feathers of their heads erected, that the owner of the abode was at length forced to relinquish his claims. The next day at noon I returned to the tree, when I found the little nocturnal vagrant snugly ensconced in his diurnal retreat.

This species of Woodpecker does not obtain the full beauty of its plumage until the second spring; and the variety of colouring which it presents in the male and female, the old and young birds, renders it one of the most interesting of those found in the United States.

YELLOW-BELLIED WOODPECKER, *Picus varius*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 147.

PICUS VARIUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 45.

PICUS (DENDROCOPUS) VARIUS, *Yellow-bellied Woodpecker*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 309.

YELLOW-BELLIED WOODPECKER, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 574.

YELLOW-BELLIED WOODPECKER, *Picus varius*, Aud. Amer. Orn., vol. ii. p. 519; vol. v. p. 537.

Male, $8\frac{1}{2}$, 15.

Breeds from Maryland northward to the Saskatchewan. Rather rare in

the interior in summer. Many spend the winter in the Southern and Western Districts.

Adult Male.

Bill longish, straight, strong, tapering, compressed towards the end, slightly truncated and cuneate at the tip; mandibles of equal length, both nearly straight in their dorsal outline, their sides convex, excepting at the base. Nostrils basal, lateral, elliptical, open, covered by the feathers, and having a sharp ridge passing over them to the edge of the bill near the middle. Head of moderate size, neck rather short, body rather robust. Feet rather short; tarsus compressed, anteriorly scutellate, laterally covered with hexagonal scales, sharp behind; two toes before, united as far as the second joint; two behind, the first very small, the second equal in length to the third, claws strong, much curved, compressed, with a short deep groove on each side, very acute.

Plumage soft, rather blended, slightly glossed, that of the head shining. Wings long, the first quill extremely small, fourth longest, third nearly equal, second shorter than fifth; secondaries slightly emarginate. Tail of ordinary length, cuneate, of ten pointed feathers, having very short shafts.

Bill brownish-black. Iris brown. Feet greyish-blue. Forehead and crown, chin and sides of the throat blood-red, the two patches margined with greenish-black, of which colour is a broad band on the occiput, and a large space on the lower neck and fore part of the breast, a broad band of white from the eye margining the back of the occiput; another from the base of the upper mandible down the side of the neck, the interspace black. Scapulars black, tinged with green. Wing-coverts and quills black, the first row of smaller coverts white, excepting at the base, those of the outer secondary coverts are white on the outer webs, and the quills, excepting the first, are spotted on the outer and inner edges, and more or less tipped with the same. The back is variegated with black and brownish-white. Tail-feathers black, the outer margined with white towards the tip, the two inner spotted with white on the inner web. Middle of the breast yellow, sides dusky yellow, variegated with brownish-black.

Length $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, extent of wings 15; bill along the ridge $\frac{10}{12}$, along the edge $1\frac{1}{12}$; tarsus $\frac{10}{12}$.

Adult Female.

The female resembles the male, but the throat is white, and the yellow of the lower parts less pure.

Yellow-bellied Woodpecker.

1. Male. 2. Female.

Prunus Caroliniana.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Yellow-Bellied Woodpecker, *Picus varius*, Linn. [Pl. 267]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 4, 263–265. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319382>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/125069>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319382>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/319382>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.