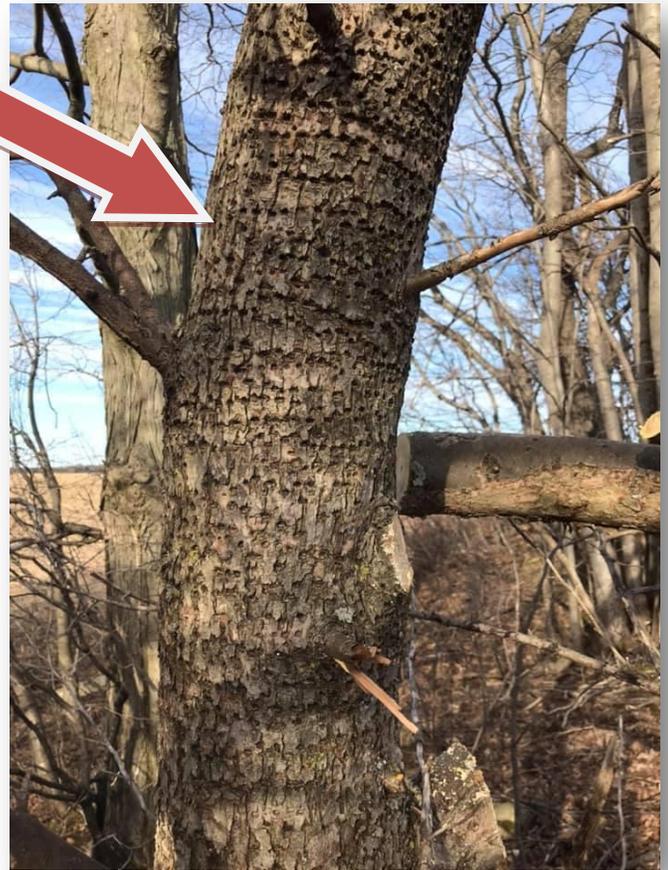


What's making holes in my trees?

This is the work of a Yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*).

They make those neat horizontal rows of holes. They feed on the sap that exudes from the holes and insects that get trapped in it. A family of sapsuckers will typically farm a group of trees in their territory for a few years before moving on to another set. Most trees recover. The holes created by the sapsuckers support a great deal of other species such as solitary bees. Overall, I see it as a good environmental indicator, though in crop trees they can be problematic. There are things you can do to deter them if you so choose. If the damage threatens the health of a tree, a burlap wrap or mylar balloons or something "scary" can be used to get the birds to move along.



These holes were made by a wood wasp and are being used by solitary bees. (C.K.)

There is a difference between the hole patterns made by sapsuckers vs other woodpeckers. This reflects the differences in their food sources and foraging habits. Yellow-bellied sapsucker select healthy trees while at the other end of the spectrum, the pileated woodpecker seeks degraded trees. This is because the sapsucker, as the name suggests wants a healthy flow of sap, whereas other genera are looking for insects that might be embedded under the bark. Thus the pattern for most woodpeckers, like the downy or hairy, is quite random, while that of sapsuckers is methodical. They create both horizontal and vertical rows. While they can do damage, woodpeckers and sapsuckers can also be quite beneficial to reduce insect pests and support other wildlife.

Sapsuckers vs other woodpeckers

- Sapsuckers drill rows ... both horizontal and vertical. They are harvesting sap and the insects it attracts.
- Other woodpeckers (e.g. downy and hairy) tend to make random patterns as they seek insects under the bark



Carpenter wasps made the small holes; a woodpecker made the large hole on my sugar maple



Random pattern

Woodpeckers and Sapsuckers serve important ecosystem services



Yellow-bellied sapsucker

yellow-bellied sapsucker Photo: James Solomon USDA Forest Service
<https://www.forestryimages.org/browse/detail.cfm?imgnum=3057026>
Sapsucker log: <https://viettes.wordpress.com/tag/woodpecker-damage/>

Smaller Sapsucker: Bill McMullen <https://www.flickr.com/photos/billmcmullen/7154681651/sizes/l/in/photostream/>



Does that mean my Apple tree is dying?

No, not at all! The members of the sapsucker group use healthy trees. They are tapping them for sap and what sap attracts-insects!

Apple Tree Holes

If you'd like to learn more, here are some references:

- [Cornell Lab of Ornithology page on Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*](#)
- [Use and Selection of Sap Trees by Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers](#) Pages 41–51,
- [Sap tree feeding preference by Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers \(*Sphyrapicus varius*\) based on tree size and species in Cheboygan County](#)
- [Conservation Assessment for the Woodpeckers in the Black Hills National Forest South Dakota](#)
- [Who Made That Hole?](#)
- [Woodpecker Tree Damage: Preventing And Repairing Woodpecker Damage](#)
- [Sapsucker Damage on Woody Plants](#)