

THE WOOD-PECKER ON THE BIRCH TREE.

BY D. NICOL, CATARAQUI, ONT.



THE vermilion crested wood-pecker—I am not sure about his specified name, but he looks very like the *Picus Pubescens*,*—is a bird about six and a half inches long, frequenting orchards and ornamental grounds in the neighborhood of dwellings, and with which almost every one interested in the growth of trees is familiar.

Its color is black and white speckled. The male differs from the female, in that he has a vermilion colored patch on the top or rather the back of his head. He is easily distinguished from some other birds of the same genus, by his loud single note uttered, and sometimes repeated, as he darts from one tree to another. The young males are not adorned with the bright crest until they are over one year old; consequently with their first coat of plumage they look very much like the mother.

He is a native of North America, and remains in Ontario throughout the year. He is a remarkably ingenious and industrious bird.

For a place in which to make their nest, a hole, as circular as if described by a pair of compasses, is cut in the solid wood of a tree, the first part about six or eight inches hori-

zontally, then downwards to the depth of eight or ten inches, roomy and capacious at the bottom, and smooth as if polished by a cabinet-maker. The entrance is judiciously left just large enough for admittance.

The eggs, generally six in number and pure white, are laid in the smooth bottom of this chamber. The male supplies the female with food, and about the first week in June the young may be seen climbing the tree with considerable dexterity.

The bird spends some portion of his time hunting for insects on apple and other trees, throwing off the outer bark scales and moss in order to get at his prey, such as spiders and their eggs, wood-lice, ants and probably some insects that may be injurious to the apple tree, although he never touches the bark louse. He also has a mischievous habit of boring small holes through the bark, about half an inch apart, in pretty regular horizontal circles around the body of the tree, as illustrated in accompanying figure, making it appear as if some human genius had spent some time boring the tree with a gimlet.

I have seen orchards in which almost every apple tree was perforated with thousands of these small holes; yet although many of the trees were seriously injured, I am not

*SIR,—Since I forwarded to you article on the "Wood-pecker," I have found the same bird fully described in Mr. McIlwraith's "Birds of Ontario," as "The yellow-bellied sapsucker," *Sphyrapicus Varius* (Linn). Here he is said to be migratory, but he sometimes stays very late and returns very early. He could be seen here in February this year.

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