

## sports &amp; outdoors

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## SWIM TEAM PLACES THIRD AT SANDWICH

The NHS swimming and diving team took third place in Sunday's season-opening Bay Colony Conference Relay Carnival at Sandwich.

The top four finishers and point totals were:

Nauset — 162  
Barnstable — 141  
Nantucket — 126  
Sandwich — 27

The next meet for Nantucket is Friday at the Cape Cod Classic at Sandwich.

## MAYFLOWER ALL-STARS

Whaler football players Tomas Smalorius and Jordan Ferreira have been selected to the Mayflower Small all-star team. Smalorius was a standout linebacker for the Whalers this year and Ferreira was an effective safety and wide receiver. Both are seniors.

## BRANT POINT RUNNERS

Results for Dec. 4

Coco Csaba Cseko 24:51  
Lisa Rance 29:36

\*Season Best

\*\* Personal Course Record CR Course Record

Runners meet Tuesdays rain or shine at 7:45 a.m. at the corner of Beach and Easton streets for an 8 a.m. start. The 5K (3.1 miles) run is on paved roads over a mostly flat course that is accurately wheel measured, with one hill and some moderate grades. Runners of all abilities, from beginners to veterans, are welcome. There are no entry fees. For information call 228-0206. Course records: Cam Stracher 15:45; Lindsay Wilkins 18:21.

## THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

## Wednesday, Dec. 12

- NHS girls' basketball vs. Upper Cape, 3 p.m.
- JV girls' basketball vs. Upper Cape, 4:30 p.m.

## Friday, Dec. 14

- NHS boys' basketball vs. Blue Hills, 3 p.m.
- NHS swimming and diving,  
Cape Cod Classic at Sandwich, 3 p.m.

## Saturday, Dec. 14

- NHS girls' basketball vs. South Shore, 1 p.m.
- NHS boys' basketball vs. South Shore, 2:30 p.m.

## Monday, Dec. 17

- CPS boys' basketball at Chatham, 3 p.m.
- NHS swimming and diving at Taunton, 3 p.m.
- CPS girls' basketball at Chatham, 5 p.m.

## BIRDS OF NANTUCKET

by Kenneth Turner Blackshaw

## SUPERSIZED!

Do you enjoy watching woodpeckers? They are the carpenters and engineers of the bird world, appearing so industrious as they methodically hitch their way up a tree trunk. They are also great musicians but I'll make you wait a bit before I explain that one.

Nantucket has two very similar woodpeckers, the Downy and the Hairy. Several years ago we discussed the Downy (Morton and Morticia) and this week we are tackling its 'supersized' relative, the Hairy.

These may sound like strange names for woodpeckers and we have to trace backwards from the scientific name to understand the reasoning. Both species were named by Carolus Linnaeus, the 18th century Swedish naturalist, for their shaggy heads. The fluffier one was given the species name, *pubescens*, and the rougher one, *villosus*, and those Latin names translate back to the common names we now use.

These two species look so similar that they provide a great challenge for beginning birders. Looking at the bird book, size seems to be the main way to tell them apart. The subtlety is that there are large Downies and small Hairies. So which ones do we see on Nantucket?

I thought the historical database of Nantucket's Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) would answer this but I was surprised by what I found. Until about 1980 Hairies and Downies were found in just about the same numbers. At that point, something happened that has caused Downy numbers to jump and Hairy numbers to plummet. In 2006 we found 64 Downies on our CBC and no Hairies at all. Perhaps the Downies are reacting to the fact that so many people are hanging out suet feeders and the Hairies are not adapting as quickly.

Both these woodpeckers sport flashy black and white plumage. They are pure white underneath and their wings are checked, black and white. They have a white patch up the middle of their back and black and white striped heads. The males have a bright red 'nuchal' patch on the back of their heads. When the birds are aroused, these feathers become elevated and the red can be stunning. This also causes non-birders to proclaim they have seen a Red-headed Woodpecker which really gets the attention of the real birders. A bona fide Red-headed Woodpecker has a completely red head, front and back, all the way down to the throat.

So how do you keep from being confused by these black and white woodworkers? First remember Rule One for woodpecker identification — it is a Downy! Rule one will apply 90 percent of the time. Now what about Rule Two? If you have a good auditory sense, Rule Two is 'Listen for the call.' Downies make a dry "pik" call note whereas Hairies do a wet-sounding "peeenk."

If your ears aren't so great, Rule Two involves visual clues. Downies have a puny, up-turned little beak. The Hairy's beak is robust and almost as long as the bird's head. A second visual clue is that



Hairy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpeckers have pure white outer tail feathers. Downy Woodpeckers have little black bars across theirs. Rule Three involves behavior. If you see a woodpecker working the top of a grass stalk, or perhaps on a tiny tree branch, it's most likely a Downy.

And last, if you see one of these woodpeckers in the summer time, May through August, it's almost a hundred percent certain to be a Downy. Hairies have not been found here during that period. As a matter of fact, Nantucket is the only place in Massachusetts where they don't nest.

Why is that you ask? Well Hairies, being bigger beasts, just like larger trees than Downies do. Up until now, there have been very few large trees and heavily wooded areas on our island. But times are changing and the forests are growing up so perhaps in the not too distant future, we'll find a Hairy Woodpecker nesting.

With their powerful woodpecker beaks, Hairies excavate their own nesting holes, generally preferring large deciduous trees. The nesting cavity may be a foot deep and is lined with wood shavings. Normally four eggs are laid. Most Hairy Woodpecker diet is insect-based. They are very clever at sensing insect larva deep within a tree trunk and have an amazingly long tongue that runs up and over the back of the head and coils around their right eye when not in use. At the end is a sharp and rigid spear used to impale their meal and snatch it back for consumption.

I said they were musicians. When it is time to proclaim their nesting territory their song involves finding a hollow tree with an adjacent hole. The result is rather like the sound from a stringed instrument. They drum on the outside and the sound reverberates inside and then pours out the entry hole. They experiment to find exactly the right spot to drum for maximum effect and can be heard a mile away.

This is a good year to find Hairy Woodpeckers on Nantucket. Perhaps you can adjust Rule One to 70 percent. You have a good chance of finding a 'supersized' woodpecker out there. ■

*George C. West creates illustrations for these articles. If you enjoy 'social' birding, join the Nantucket Bird Club at 8 a.m. Sundays in front of Nantucket High School for a two to three hour birding trip. Call 228-1693 for more information.*

*To hear about rare birds, or to leave a bird report call the Massachusetts Audubon hot line at 1-781-259-8805. Ask Ken a question at: kenandcindy1@comcast.net.*

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