



# Tales from a West Michigan Wood

by Carol Doeringer / [www.caroldoeringer.com](http://www.caroldoeringer.com)

## Nature Discovery Activity: Drum like a Woodpecker

Ages 3+

Adult help needed for younger children

Purpose: Learn what is special about the trees that woodpeckers select for their drumming.

Time to complete: 1 hour

### Materials needed

A variety of hollow cylinders made of different materials.

- Ideas include an empty metal food can (check for sharp edges and apply masking tape if needed), a cardboard potato-chip can, a ceramic or glass vase or mug, a plastic peanut butter jar.
- It's best if the cylinders are about the same size, and in the spirit of being a woodpecker, it's great to have one made of wood. That's a little harder to find (the one in the picture is a small wooden utensil holder).



A bag of rice.

A pencil or a wooden paintbrush about the size of a pencil.

Rubber bands.

Latex balloons. You can use 12" (when inflated) balloons for cylinder diameters up to about 4 inches. For wider cylinders, you'll need 15" balloons. They're harder to find but available online.

Scissors that will cut the uninflated balloons.

*Activity steps begin on the next page.*

**Activity Steps**

- 1) Watch the video featured in the post called *Drum Beat of the Northern Flicker*.

Think about the sound you hear when the flicker strikes the tree with his bill. Is the sound soft or sharp? Low or high? Fast or slow?

Watch the video again. What do you notice about the tree that he uses as his drum? Is it hard or soft? Solid or hollow? What is that big dark area next to the bird?

Watch the video one more time! What do you imagine about the flicker's bill, which he uses as a drumstick? Is it hard or soft? Pointed or rounded?

- 2) Using the materials you gathered, make a variety of drums. For each drum, cut the small end off a balloon and stretch it as tightly as you can over the cylinder's opening at the top. The balloon will hold pretty tight, but its edges may roll up as you use the drum, so loop a rubber band around the edge to help hold it in place.



- 3) Use your pencil or paintbrush to tap each drum. Tap it on the stretched balloon and tap it on the side of the drum. Compare the sounds you get as you tap drums made of different materials.
- 4) Think about the sounds you're making and compare them to the sound of the flicker drumming. Which of your drums makes the deepest sound? The highest sound? The quietest sound? How does each drum's sound change when you switch from tapping on the balloon to tapping on the side of the drum?
- 5) Pick the drum that you think sounds most like the flicker's drum when you tap it. Now, remove the balloon and fill the cylinder with rice. Put the balloon back, secure it with the rubber band, and tap some more. How does the sound of the drum compare to the sound your tapping made when it was empty?
- 6) Imagine you are a northern flicker, or any bird in the woodpecker family. It's time to announce that you are claiming a territory. You want to find the best tree for your drum, the one that will send your drumroll across the forest. What should you look for as you inspect the trees in your territory?

**Bonus question!** Each time the flicker drums the tree, his drumroll lasts about one full second. How many times do you think he strikes the tree with each drumroll? How many strikes can *you* make in one second?

To find out how many strikes the woodpecker makes, ask an adult to check the *Drumbeat of the Northern Flicker* blog post on Tales of a West Michigan Wood, or read about the flicker's drumming on the All About Birds website. [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern\\_Flicker/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Flicker/sounds)

The website address for *Tales of a West Michigan Wood* is <https://www.caroldoeringer.com/>

Another great way to learn about the northern flicker is to read this article by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/living/northernflickers.pdf>