

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):

1, presumably male (although chin not examined closely enough to eliminate possibility of female). In terms of age, I tried to determine whether there was contrast in the wing that would indicate a first-winter bird, but lighting and the base color made that task too hard for me.
3. Locality: Parish: Vermilion
4. Specific Locality: Pecan Island area
5. Date(s) when observed: 26 and 30 Jan, 1 Feb 2026
6. Time(s) of day when observed: various
7. Reporting observer and address: Paul Edward Conover, Lafayette LA
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s):
Rob Dobbs, Matt Conn
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):

Although a RNSA was discovered at this site a few weeks previously and was later seen by some parties, this individual was presumably first noted by Garber, Lane, Remsen on 13 Jan 2026. Dan Lane, Matt Conn, Rob Dobbs, and Connor Gable also photographed this individual. All other photos in eBird from this location are the bird originally found by Moon, Patton, and Wallace.
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):
Various, sometimes backlit, sometimes in good light
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition):
12x binos, Canon r10 w/ 200 mm lens
12. Distance to bird(s): From ca. 20 meters and up
13. Duration of observation: All added up, probably 10-15 minutes of viewing, not always optimal
14. Habitat: Live Oak dominated forest and edge on an ancient beach ridge
15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):
Seen feeding, preening, and in competition with a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

16. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

A sapsucker with a substantial red patch on nape, back pattern of pale stripes in two discrete rows, red of throat patch extruding through the black border of the patch.



Brightened photo on top to show extent of red extruding onto throat border. Black border is clearly truncated, is completely covered in some areas, and is reduced to a narrow line in others. Many RNSA show this pattern. YBSA can also show an extrusion of red, but not typically—if ever—this extensive. White facial stripes well within range of RNSA, and not so extreme as to suggest YBSA, as can be seen better in unbrightened version below.

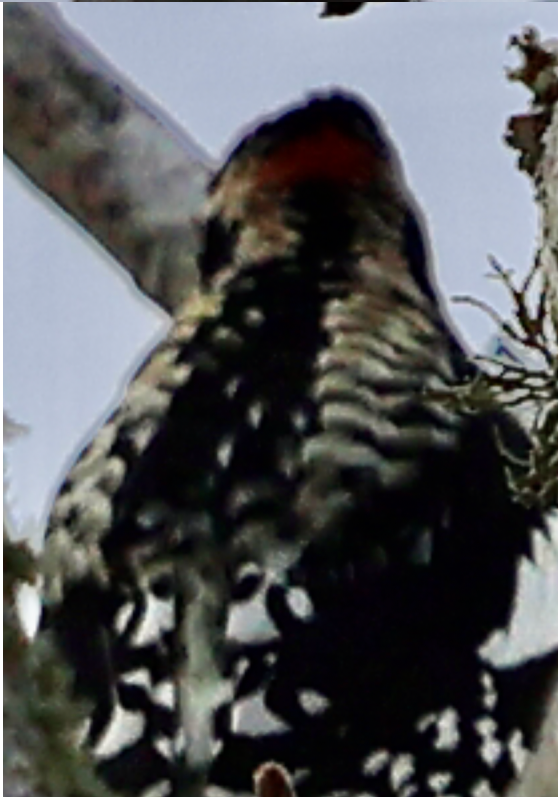




White on back arranged in two discrete tire tread patterns with a few white feather tips between them (bottom image brightened). This bird is in relatively fresh plumage (molted in late summer-early fall), and the amount of white is typical ("Back and scapulars black faintly glossed with greenish blue with heavy spotting of white or brownish white, more prominent on sides of back" per Birds of World). Broad stripes with this pattern are common in winter RNSA. The white tips in mid-back and the external "treads" of the stripes are lost to wear during breeding season, producing the narrower, wispy stripes seen in summer that are often associated with RNSA.

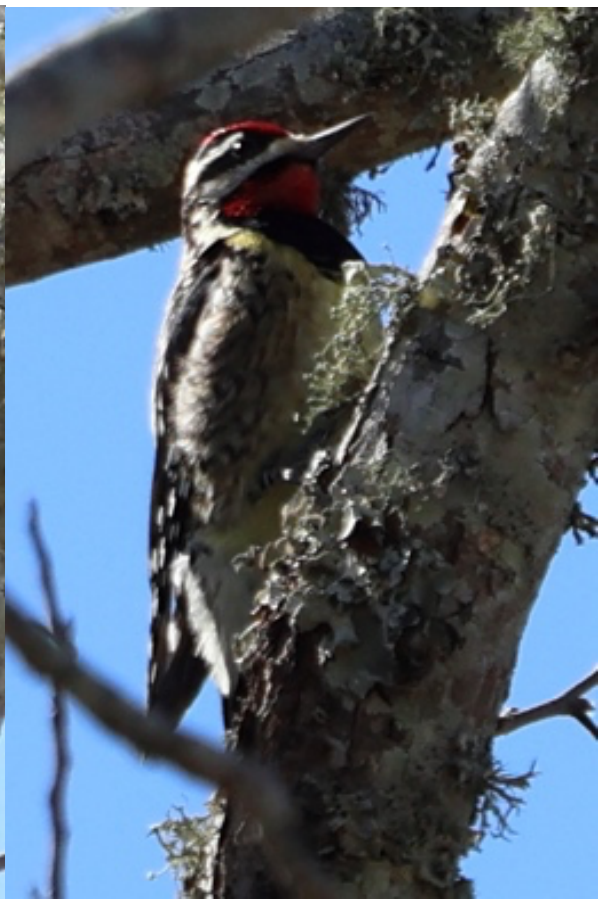
Broad red nape patch.

Note the tertial pattern unique to this individual that allows individual ID vs another red-naped bird present at same location.





Brightened images



Other features, such as yellow on belly, typical of both RNSA and YBSA.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

I'll preface this by saying that previous iterations of the committee tried to pigeonhole RNSA traits into narrow confines that matched field guide illustrations exactly, but RNSA is utterly variable and is subject to seasonal variation as well, with no two showing the same throat, tertial, back, nape, or face patterns.

Also, those LBRC groups unfortunately trusted guidance from Members that mistakenly claimed advanced knowledge of this species. For example, records were rejected because birds had "nape patch on white rather than black background," and had a "white postocular stripe that merges from both sides onto the red nape," traits which were said to indicate YBSA. Those statements can be dismissed very easily by looking at a single field guide or photograph, the former fieldmark because the red patch of RNSA never has a black background and the latter because the fieldmark exists on all RNSA ("band of white from behind eye to red patch on nape," per Cornell Birds of the World). Likewise, at least one record was devalued because of the shape of the nape patch (possibly influenced by Project Sapsucker's hypothetical hybrid scale, which itself ignores the widespread and typical variation far removed from the contact zone). Even interpretation of "standard" fieldmarks such as width of facial stripes and width of dorsal stripes did not factor in individual and seasonal variation. These errors and oversights stubbornly persisted and held the LBRC in their sway for three decades, no matter how often and abundantly evidence to the contrary was presented. The re-review of photo-supported RNSA records rejected by the LBRC should be considered.

That said, in my limited set of photos of this individual, all fieldmarks that are considered indicative of RNSA were visible. The black border of the red throat badge is clearly truncated by extensive extrusion of red from the throat patch, the back showed two discrete dorsal stripes that match many those seen in many RNSA on Macauley, and a definite red nape patch, not just a tinge of red, was present. The facial pattern also falls within the range of variation seen in winter and some summer RNSA on Macauley.

Arguments can be made that winter birds in Macauley could represent hybrids from the contact zone, but photos from across the entire range of RNSA show broad variation, and a.) such a widespread dispersal of hybrids from such a narrow contact zone seems unlikely, and b.) the possibility that numerous individuals of a relatively tiny needle of hybrids have been encountered and photographed among such a huge haystack of purebreds is implausible. The latter point might be countered by the claim that odd birds have been selectively documented by observers, but none of the checklists that I scrolled through noted anything unusual about appearance that suggest that the birds were documented because they appeared to be hybrids or otherwise unusual. I think observers have simply randomly sampled RNSA and that the variation depicted is typical.

I don't see any reason to doubt that this individual has the markings of a RNSA, and I don't feel anything suggests YBSA or hybrid.

For more on variation on sapsuckers, see: [Variation in Red-naped and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers](#)

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Photos attached are all by me. Other observers also photographed this bird. See observers above.

19. Previous experience with this species: At least a couple of accepted records in Louisiana, and extensive contact out west, where I make it a point to look for them on trips every couple of years.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

Based on field experience with YBSA and RNSA and home study. Since the early 1990s I've regularly looked at whatever sapsucker photos or literature I can find, and clearly resources like Macauley have been a bonanza for comparing regional and seasonal aspects of RNSA. In terms of the Pecan Island bird(s), I discussed the possibility of two birds being present with Dobbs, Garber, Lane, and Remsen. Garber was able to recall important information from his sighting, which supported what appeared to be differences in photos and allowed the presence of two birds to be determined. Mlodinow's RNSA article linked above, Birds of the World, Pyle, and various other literature has been consulted over the years and figures into my report.

21. Certainty level: I'm not even sure RNSA is a valid species, and I'm not sure anyone is. However, phenotypically, this bird seems to meet the standard for what is currently considered the species, RNSA.

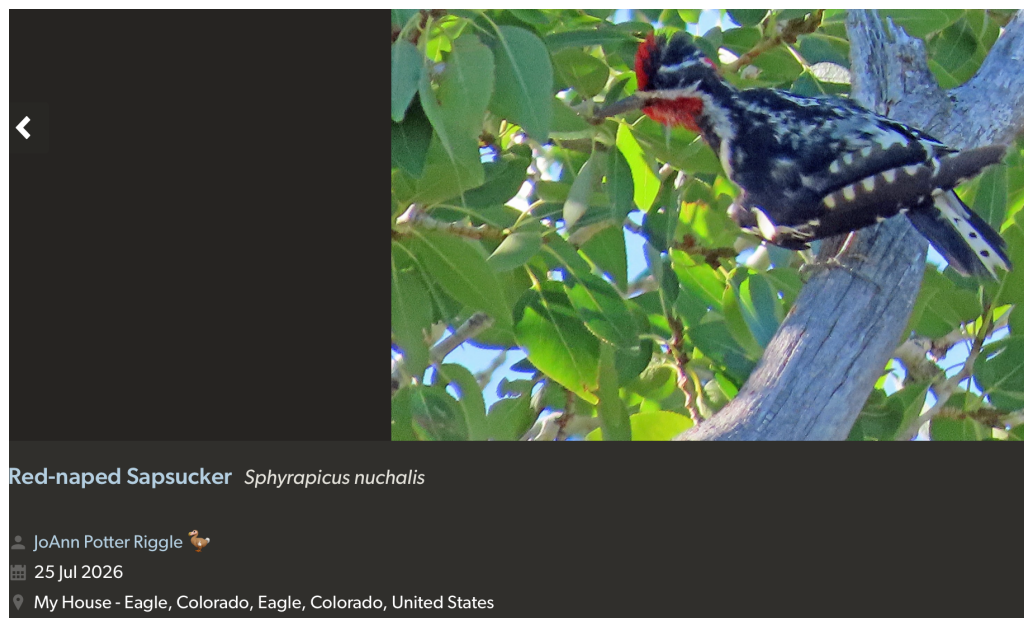
22. This description is written from: memory and perusal of photos by me and others that saw this individual, which are identifiable to individual based on tertial pattern.

23. Date: 24 July 2026

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? Yes and yes

THE PHOTOS BELOW ARE NOT OF THE REPORTED BIRD, BUT ARE INCLUDED FOR COMPARATIVE PURPOSES.

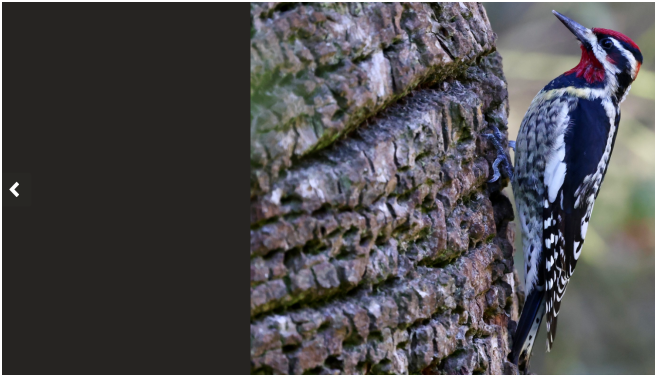
Below are some examples of variation in back and face pattern in presumed male RNSA. These are all summer birds outside of the contact zone, so many are in more worn plumage than the PI bird.





Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

👤 Mason Maron
📅 27 May 2022
📍 Wenas Campground, Yakima, Washington, United States



Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

👤 Alice Church
📅 15 Feb 2023
📍 Golden Gate Park--Arboretum (San Francisco Botanical Garden), San Francisco, California, United States



Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

👤 Jim Merritt
📅 26 Jul 2023
📍 North Michigan Creek Reservoir, Jackson, Colorado, United States

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Note the amount of red invading the black border, and also how the white wing patch is degraded down to wisps on this bird, and consider how the dorsal stripes might have looked when fresh. Also note the wear on the white facial stripes.

A photograph of a Red-naped Sapsucker perched on a tree branch. The bird is facing right, showing its red head, black eye stripe, and black and white streaked body. The background is a solid light green.

Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

 Steve Wickliffe

 13 Jun 2026

 Anaconda, MT Sunnyside Rd., Deer Lodge, Montana, United States

AGE AND SEX Adult Male - 1

BEHAVIORS Vocalizing