

# THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA'S SAPSUCKERS

A who's who, with notes on who's with whom.

① A pair of adult yellow-bellied sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus varius*). Note the broad white markings on the back of the female (right), the solid white (female) and red (male) throats, and solid black bib on the male. (May 2021, Chittenden, VT)

② Northern red-breasted sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber* ssp. *ruber*). Note the near lack of white in the head and the extent of the deep ruby-red breast. (May 2018, Silver Falls State Park, OR)

③ An adult southern red-breasted sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber* ssp. *daggetti*). Note the white mustache stripe extending below the cheek and the white behind the eye; also minimal red in the breast. (Jan. 2019, Alum Rock Park, San Jose, CA)

④ An adult female red-naped sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*). Note the clear break between the red in the nape and crown, the female's white chin (barely visible here), and two strips of white down its back (this nesting bird is a bit worn, so the back stripes are a little funky). (June 2009, Camp Sherman, OR)

⑤ A red-breasted x yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber* x *S. varius*). This hybrid combination is very unlikely to be encountered in the Bay Area, although there are a few records for California. This angle alone on the bird is not diagnostic, but note the mix of plumage traits from multiple *varius* species. (May 2006, Yukon Territory, CAN)

⑥ An adult male hybrid red-naped x yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis* x *S. varius*). This individual looks mostly like a red-naped sapsucker, except for the solid black border around the red throat patch. The red on a red-naped would bleed all the way across the distal bend in the black stripe. The minimal red in the nape barely fits within the range of variation for red-naped. (June 2009, southern Alberta, CAN)

⑦ An adult hybrid red-breasted x red-naped sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber* x *S. nuchalis*) at active phloem wells in a willow. This bird shows far too much red to be a red-naped, but the bold white facial markings and black bleeding through the red chest indicate mixed parentage. (July 2018, Sisters, OR)

# BAY NATURE

## SAPSUCKER SUPERSPECIES

The three sapsuckers in the *varius* superspecies are so closely related that they will breed with one of their sister species.

### Yellow-Bellied



① Yellow-Bellied  
*Sphyrapicus varius*

### Red-Breasted



② Northern Red-Breasted  
*Sphyrapicus ruber* ssp. *ruber*

### Red-Naped



④ Red-Naped  
*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

### Red-Breasted x Yellow-Bellied



⑤ *Sphyrapicus ruber* x *Sphyrapicus varius*  
RAREST OF THEM ALL!

### Red-Naped x Yellow-Bellied



⑥ *Sphyrapicus nuchalis* x *Sphyrapicus varius*

### Red-Breasted x Red-Naped



⑦ *Sphyrapicus ruber* x *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

Credits from top, left to right: (1) Kyle Tansley; (2-4) Stephen Shunk; (5) Cameron Eckert; (6) Jocelyn Hudon; (7) Stephen Shunk.