

Topic Page: [Dendrocolaptidae](#)

Summary Article: **woodcreeper**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

or woodhewer, common names for woodpeckerlike birds of tropical forest and brush, constituting about 50 species in the family Dendrocolaptidae. Supported by their stiff tails, they cling vertically to tree trunks, progressing upward in short hops, circling the tree while exploring crevices for spiders and small insects, especially carpenter ants. When they reach the branches, they fly off to begin their curious climb from the base of another tree. Exception to this behavior is shown by the great rufous woodcreeper (*Xiphocolaptes major*) of N Argentina, a ground feeder, and the ochreous-billed woodcreeper (*Dendrocincla meruloides*) of Trinidad, noted for following columns of marching ants. Woodcreepers resemble the woodpeckers in form, having short legs with powerful, sharply clawed feet, stiff-shafted tail feathers, and moderately long, woodpeckerlike bills. Woodcreeper bills vary, however, from the long scimitar-shaped beak of the scythebill (*Campylorhaphus falcularius*), half as long as the bird itself, to the short beak of the wedgebill (genus *Glyphorhynchus*), with its slightly upcurved lower mandible. Found from Mexico to all but southernmost South America, woodcreepers are typically olive-plumaged with reddish wings and tail and striped heads and underparts. They range in body length from 5 to 15 in. (13–38 cm). They typically lay their two to three plain white or whitish eggs in leaf-lined tree holes, which, unlike true woodpeckers, they do not excavate for themselves. They usually take over the abandoned nests of other cavity nesters, such as the woodpecker. Woodcreepers are classified in the phylum Chordata, subphylum Vertebrata, class Aves, order Passeriformes, family Dendrocolaptidae.

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