



Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

Pileated woodpeckers grow larger than all but one other woodpecker species in North America. At up to 19 1/2 inches long, with a wingspan of up to 30 inches, they are an impressive sight. Despite their size, however, pileated woodpeckers often frustrate birdwatchers who find it difficult to spot the shy birds.

Late successional forests provide the bird's most common home. But birdwatchers also find them in second growth stands and areas with large, dead trees.

Insects, especially carpenter ants and the larva of wood boring beetles, make up most of the woodpecker's diet. The birds cut fist-sized cavities into tree trunks, then use their long, sticky tongues to reach the insects. They will even excavate cavities into fallen logs.

Pileated woodpeckers mate for life, sharing territory all year. Courtship begins in February or March. The birds nest in dead trees 25 to 80 feet above ground by cutting a large hole in the tree's trunk. It may



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take up to 30 days for a pair of birds to finish a nest hole. Although nest cavity dimensions vary, they average 19 inches deep and 6 1/2 inches in diameter at the bottom.

Each pair raises only one brood of young per season, with a clutch size typically of four eggs. The white, translucent eggs average 1 1/3 by 1 inches.

Over a period of 15 to 18 days, both parents incubate the eggs; male birds incubate the eggs at night. During incubation the shy birds become even more secretive.

When the eggs hatch, the parents share the responsibilities of raising the young. Pileated woodpeckers begin life blind, naked and entirely dependent on their parents. The hatchlings' diet consists primarily of regurgitated insects. With adequate food, the young birds maximize their weight by their 21st day of life.

The young grow feathers by the end of the following week. Two days later, they leave the nest for the first time. After they can fly well, the young woodpeckers follow their parents for several more months until they can find their own food.

In the fall, pileated woodpeckers leave their parents to wander until spring. Then they will seek a mate and perhaps build their first nest. The birds live up to 10 years.

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