

## Pileated Woodpecker

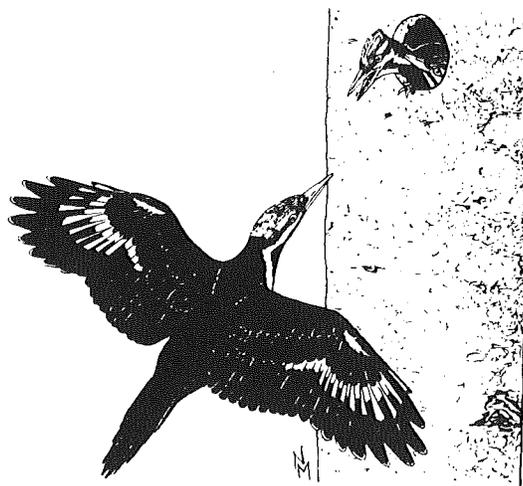
*Dryocopus pileatus*

Assuming the Ivory-billed Woodpecker to be extinct, the Pileated is North America's largest woodpecker. The Pileated is found over most of eastern North America south of Hudson Bay, west through the forests north of the Great Plains, and south through British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon to northern California.

The Pileated generally inhabits extensive woodlands, including coniferous, mixed, and deciduous forests. In woodland openings it feeds on the ground and on downed trees. It is a very secretive species, difficult to see for a bird its size; many Pileateds are heard for every one seen. The Pileated has increased in numbers markedly in recent years. Following the extensive logging of the eastern forests in the 1800s, this bird became quite scarce, holding on in the few remaining stands of heavy timber (Forbush 1927). Within the last 50 years it has become much more tolerant of disturbance; Atlas Project workers recorded it nesting even at the edges of cities and towns.

The Pileated is essentially a resident, non-migratory species, although some altitudinal migration may take place in Vermont, with individuals dropping to the valley areas during the worst of the winter months and returning to the higher elevations in the early spring (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.). Some dispersal takes place in April, with Pileateds turning up in areas where they are not ordinarily seen (Bull 1964). Forty-one Pileated Woodpeckers were recorded in Vermont by Christmas Bird Counts in 1981 (CBC 1981-82).

The Pileated Woodpecker can most easily be located by the loud calls that it gives frequently during the spring and early summer. It is a surprisingly silent bird at other times of the year. The hammering it makes when feeding is louder and carries farther than that of other woodpeckers. The presence of Pileateds in an area is often revealed by their distinctive rectangular feeding

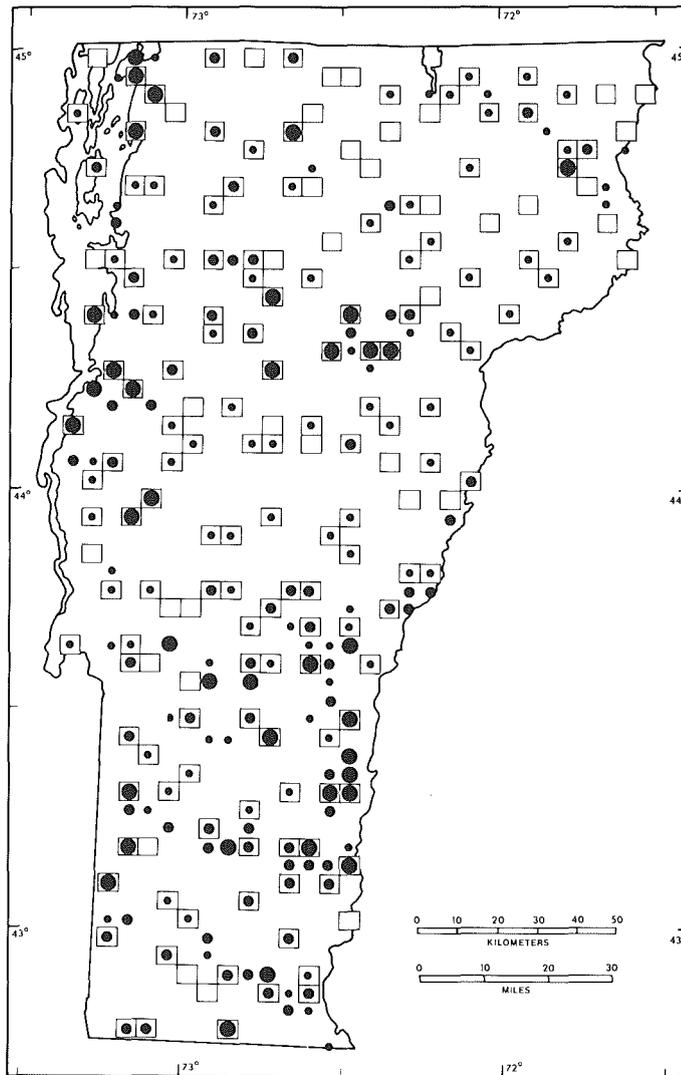


holes, 10–20 cm (4–8 in) deep; a pile of fresh chips is usually found below.

The Pileated Woodpecker has two main calls. One resembles the flicker's *wick wick* call, but is louder; the notes are spaced somewhat irregularly, with hesitation between the notes. The most frequently heard call resembles a flicker's rolling stacatto, but is louder, stronger, and slower; it begins with a rising inflection and concludes with a falling one at the end of the series. The Pileated's resonant, rolling drumming, which speeds up and fades away at the end, is distinctive.

This species is difficult to confirm, as it generally nests in heavy timber and is silent around its nest tree, slipping in and out of the nesting area unobtrusively (W. J. Norse, pers. observ.). Nonetheless, in 17 of 38 Vermont confirmations (45%) active nests were located. The families are more conspicuous after the young are out of the nest; consequently, 34% of Vermont Atlas Project confirmations were of recently fledged young.

The nest is a cavity with an entrance hole about 8 by 9 cm (3.1 by 3.5 in); the cavity is cut in a dead tree or stub 5–21 m (15–70 ft) above the ground, in dense shade below the main canopy of the forest. The nest tree is generally 38–51 cm (15–20 in) in diameter, and is usually located in a dense stand of trees. Many species of trees are used: poplars, maples, and various conifers.



**No. of priority blocks in which recorded**

TOTAL 140 (78%)

Possible breeding: 70 (50% of total)

Probable breeding: 42 (30% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 28 (20% of total)

**Physiographic regions in which recorded**

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	26	84	19
Green Mountains	42	78	30
North Central	13	68	9
Northeast Highlands	9	56	6
East Central	15	79	11
Taconic Mountains	12	75	9
Eastern Foothills	23	96	16

Nesting information from Atlas Project workers suggests that dates for tending the nest range from May 14 to June 19. The incubation period is 15 to 16 days (Kilham 1983). The normal clutch is 4 white eggs, although 3 of 4 Vermont nests contained clutches of 3 eggs. One nest found 30 feet up in a poplar contained 3 eggs; another nest contained 4 eggs. Dates of three nests with young (NY) ranged from June 10 to 29. Fledglings were reported from June 20 to July 14; an observer at Winhall on the latter date found a brood out of the nest and able to fly.

The Pileated Woodpecker's favorite food

is carpenter ants, excavated directly from trees; it also takes wood-boring beetles, both grubs and adults. Wild fruits and acorns are this species' only vegetable foods.

During the Atlas Project the Pileated Woodpecker turned out to be widely distributed in Vermont. It was not confined to heavy forests or high mountain areas. Confirmations may have been more numerous in the Champlain Lowlands and Connecticut River valley because of the open nature of these regions.

WILLIAM J. NORSE