

Species Highlight: Pileated Woodpecker

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Have you ever heard the sound of a drum as you go for a walk or sit on your porch? Don't worry, it's not Jumanji, but if you take a look around, you might see a red mohawk climbing up and down and all around tree trunks and branches. And consider yourself lucky! This shy, but quick bird is a Pileated Woodpecker, the largest woodpecker in North America (only second to its possibly extinct cousin, the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker) at 16-19 inches in length. According to Merriam-Webster, "pileated" means "having a pileus; specifically having a crest covering the pileum". To further dissect this definition, "pileum" is "the top of the head of a bird from the bill to the nape". Yep! Pileated is a fancy word to describe this specific woodpecker's headbanging mohawk!

The beginning of avian history arose about 150 million years ago. All birds, extinct and extant, plus their ancestors are divided into many different orders and families. Our species highlight today has been given the order "Piciformes" which contains six families of cavity nesting birds and the largest family "Picidae" with more than half of the 378 species.

Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*) excavate many roosting and nesting cavities that are often used by other species once the woodpeckers have moved on. Their tail is stiff which helps support them against tree trunks. They have a chisel-tipped beak; an essential tool for creating their cavities and searching for food. They have a bony, but muscle-cushioned skull with long-clawed toes that keep them upright. This North American native loves to eat carpenter ants, wood-boring beetle larvae, flies, grasshoppers and caterpillars which means that this bird relies pretty heavily on dead and dying trees within forested environments.

The Pileated Woodpecker has gorgeous and sleek black plumage on the majority of its body with white and black under the wings. Their head is a mix of white with a red crest and black eyeliner. Females only have a red crest, while the males will have a red crest and a matching moustache. You may often see this striking bird in pairs as they mate for life although they don't share a bedroom! These woodpeckers can also sometimes be heard defending their territory with vigor and loud "wuk" calls because ain't nobody sharing beetle larvae in this economy!

But it's easy to share space with these beloved birds, made recognizable by Woody Woodpecker all the way back in 1940 by Walter Lantz. While they won't use mand-made nest boxes, they will sometimes visit or become dedicated guests at Tail Prop Suet Feeders or Cylinder Feeders with bark butter, or wild fruits and nuts like blackberries. You may even see multiple generations visiting your native friendly yard as they can live up to 10 years! So many babies!

A bird bath is also a great option as long as it is kept clean of debris. Visiting nearby parks and preserves, like Cypress Creek Nature Preserve or Brooker Creek Preserve, can also be a great opportunity to catch a glimpse of this once elusive bird! Pileated Woodpeckers is a species that Owl's Nest Sanctuary has had the pleasure of assisting in the past, so don't forget to follow us on Facebook to hear about these wonderful rescues from our volunteers and donate on our website so we can continue sharing these stories!

- Pileated Woodpecker Identification, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

By Anon / Container: www.allaboutbirds.org / URL:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Pileated_Woodpecker/id?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuJ2xBhA3EiwAMVjkVHGgyafF5stjKMvauA-AZYoWsnW3HkEf5Tl-dr4w84WAIrg5fsDEVBoC3YYQAvD_BwE

- Pileated Woodpecker

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[woodpecker/?psafe_param=1&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuJ2xBhA3EiwAMVjkVE7oXcYWy26uVzo-9cN6YsatZsKBczoeYxHH9fTJZ5jy3dJeHGtgwxoCIZsQAvD_BwE](https://abcbirds.org/bird/pileated-woodpecker/?psafe_param=1&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuJ2xBhA3EiwAMVjkVE7oXcYWy26uVzo-9cN6YsatZsKBczoeYxHH9fTJZ5jy3dJeHGtgwxoCIZsQAvD_BwE)

- Attracting Pileated Woodpeckers to Your Backyard, Wild Birds Unlimited – Nature Shop

By Anon / Container: barrie.wbu.com / URL: <https://barrie.wbu.com/attracting-pileated-woodpeckers>

- 8 Woodpeckers of Florida: The avian carpenters

By Jacob Irgens-Møller Nielsen / Year: 2023 / Container: Avibirds.com / URL:

<https://avibirds.com/woodpeckers-of-florida/#:~:text=Some%20of%20the%20best%20places%20to%20look%20for%20Pileated%20Woodpeckers,and%20the%20Ocala%20National%20Forest.>

- Forshaw, Joseph, et al. *The Encyclopedia of Animals*. edited by Lesley Dow et al., Lynn Humphries, 2004, p. 245-377