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Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*

The Pileated Woodpecker is such an impressive sight that many people believe the bird is rarer than it is. It resides from Nova Scotia and Ontario south to Texas and Florida and west through central Canada to British Columbia and northern California.

Habitat. The Pileated Woodpecker is at home in a wide variety of habitats in Florida obviously the key to its success. It can be found in deep forests, swamps, open woodlands, large parks, and suburban areas, where large tracts of trees have been spared. It requires fairly large territories but adapts well to regenerating areas and second-growth forest.

More than 80% of this woodpecker's diet consists of insects in the spring and summer, but fruits, nuts, and berries make up more than half of the diet in the fall and winter (Howell 1932, Martin et al. 1951).

The nest is placed relatively high in a dead tree or, often, a utility pole. The female lays 3 to 5 white eggs, but 4 eggs are most common. Incubation takes 14 to 18 days, and the young leave the nesting cavity at 24 to 28 days of age (Bull and Jackson 1995).



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Seasonal Occurrence. Pileated Woodpeckers are permanent residents in Florida and throughout their range. Egg dates are mid-March through mid-May.

Status. Of the 7 species of woodpecker nesting in Florida, the Pileated Woodpecker is the third most common, exceeded in abundance only by *Red-bellied Woodpecker* and the *Downy Woodpecker*. Many people will be surprised to learn that the Pileated Woodpecker is more widespread than the *Northern Flicker* or the *Red-headed Woodpecker*, but the Atlas data show that this is clearly the case.

The Pileated Woodpecker was reported in 888 quads, while the *Northern Flicker* was found in 797 and the *Red-headed Woodpecker* in 596. It is true that the Pileated Woodpecker was confirmed as a breeder in fewer quads than either of the other 2, but this only reflects the fact that it is more skillful at hiding the nest. Despite the large size of the nest entrance and the tendency of the adults to be noisy and conspicuous, they become amazingly furtive when they are near the active nest. They also have the knack of picking a nest tree in a remote and unfrequented area, all of which makes the nest surprisingly hard to find.

Pairs form permanent bonds and stay on the same territory all year long, which means that Pileated Woodpeckers are actually nesting in almost every quadrangle where they were reported. The Atlas map shows that this woodpecker is distributed uniformly across the state, except in the area southeast of Lake Okechobe which consists of agricultural areas and sawgrass marshes where large trees are notably absent.

The species is also absent from the Keys, except the extreme Upper Keys near the mainland, and is lacking in the mangrove region of the extreme southern peninsula near Cape Sable. Other blank spots on the map are probably largely artifacts of sampling. Those areas where the species was confirmed as a breeder are concentrated around population centers such as Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Gainesville, and Orlando, or areas

such as Pasco and Polk counties, where Atlas coverage was especially thorough.

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