

PILEATED WOOD- PECKER

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Dryocopus pileatus

REGION

Widespread in forested areas from Vancouver Island to Nova Scotia but absent in Newfoundland.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least concern

WHY SO SPECIAL?

Unintentionally makes sought-after homes for its neighbours

THE CROW-SIZED PILEATED

woodpecker is a year-round resident of woodlands throughout the country and the largest woodpecker in North America. This hefty hammerhead typically mates for life. Every spring, crucial courtship behaviour includes excavating a new nest cavity, strengthening the bond between a pair.

Pileated woodpeckers also dig out extra cavities and use those or cavities dug in past years as nocturnal roosts. They may have more than 40 cavities in their defended territory, most of which they don't use. An abandoned cavity can last 20 to 30 years, and so many of the woodpeckers' neighbours depend on these vacant cavities to raise their own families. The temporary lodgers include buffleheads, wood ducks, and common and hooded mergansers, as well as boreal owls, saw-whets and northern pygmy owls. Northern flying squirrels are also enthusiastic tenants, as are several species of bats.

In many woodlands, tree cavities can be in short supply, and so the annual nesting excavations of pileated woodpeckers have earned them the designation as a keystone species because so many other species depend on them to raise their young. The activities of pileated woodpeckers enrich the biodiversity of every woodland in which they live.—WAYNE LYNCH

