

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

PILEATED WOODPECKER

Dryocopus pileatus

Family: PICIDAE
B308

Order: PICIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

An uncommon, yearlong resident of mature, montane conifer habitats in the North Coast, Klamath, Cascade, and Sierra Nevada Ranges.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Annual diet 70% animal foods; mostly carpenter ants. Wood-boring beetles and various insect larvae also taken. Plant foods include nuts, berries, and other fruits. Amount of plant food highest in fall (Beal 1911). Forages on decayed and live tree trunks, snags, logs, and stumps over 18 cm (7 in) in diameter (Bull and Meslow 1977). Digs extensive, rectangular holes when feeding, usually within 3 m (10 ft) of ground. Feeding areas generally have less than 10% ground cover of logs.

Cover: Occupies dense, mature forests with large numbers of snags, stumps, and logs for cover. Prefers areas with at least 40% canopy. Frequents Douglas-fir, white fir, and red fir more than other conifers.

Reproduction: Nests in coniferous and deciduous snags or living trees with dead limbs. Selects large snag or tree in a dense stand (Harris 1982) for nesting, at least 50 cm (20 in) dbh, and in stands with other large snags and trees (Bull and Meslow 1977). Nest cavity usually 4.6 to 21 m (15-70 ft) above the ground; average 12.8 m (42 ft). Entrance hole 10.2 cm x 7.2 cm (4 x 3 in) diameter. A new cavity excavated each breeding season. Male does most excavating.

Water: Requires a water source near nest; drinks copiously during nesting (Pfitzenmeyer 1956).

Pattern: Requires large areas of mature conifer forest (these frequently 100-300 yr old), with a permanent water source. In Oregon, Bull and Meslow (1977) recommended a foraging habitat of 200-480 ha (500-1200 ac) with a core of 40 ha (100 ac) of nesting habitat, and at least 35 snags per km² (90 per mi²) over 50 cm (20 in) dbh.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not migratory.

Home Range: In conifer forests of northeastern Oregon, home range was 128-240 ha (320-600 ac). Minimum breeding density for 13 pairs was 1 pair per 648 ha (1620 ac) (Bull and Meslow 1977). Home range in New York varied in radius from 4.8 to 6.4 km (3-4 mi) in a mixed conifer-hardwood forest (Hoyt 1957).

Territory: Bull and Meslow (1977) estimated territory size of 130-243 ha (320-600 ac) in Oregon.

Reproduction: Breeds from early March to early July, with peak activity early May to mid-June. One clutch per year of 4 eggs, range 3-5. Incubation about 18 days; shared during day, but mostly by male at night. Fledging at 26-28 days. May renest if nest disturbed early in incubation. Male and female apparently pair for life.

Niche: Parents defend nest aggressively from intruders. Nestlings may be preyed upon by raccoons, bobcats, martens, long-tailed weasels, squirrels, mice, porcupines, crows, and jays. Drills the largest holes and cavities of any woodpecker in California. These provide nesting cavities for many species of secondary cavity-nesters, including mergansers and wood ducks. Has a low tolerance for disturbance by humans. Numbers apparently declining as a result of logging mature forests and cutting snags (Verner and Boss 1980, Harris 1982).

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