



# Pileated Woodpecker

## *National Wildlife Refuge System*

- Pileated woodpeckers, fairly common in the United States, are among the largest birds in the forest: about the size of a crow. And forests are just where you will find them.
- They prefer mature deciduous or mixed deciduous/coniferous woodlands -- from the tall western hemlock stands of the Northwest to beech and maple forests in New England and cypress swamps of the Southeast. They love big, dead trees for nesting.
- Adult birds are 16-19 inches long and weigh an average 11 ounces.
- The pileated woodpecker forages for its favorite food – carpenter ants supplemented by other ants, termites and other bugs – by creating large rectangular holes in standing dead trees, stumps and fallen logs. The holes are so large -- often a foot long and very deep – that they attract smaller animals like swifts, owls, ducks, bats and pine martens.
- The woodpecker also eats wild fruits and nuts, including greenbrier, hackberry, sassafras, blackberries, sumac berries, poison ivy, holly, dogwood, persimmon and elderberry.
- A pileated woodpecker pair stays together in its territory all year round. A clutch is three to five white eggs, with an incubation period of 15-18 days.
- The male begins building the nesting cavity and does most of the work, but the female contributes as the nest nears completion. The nest can be 10 to 24 inches deep.
- Most woodpeckers create a round nest hole. Not so the pileated woodpecker, whose nest hole is oblong. Pileated woodpeckers line their nests only with the fallen wood chips created by their construction, which takes about three to six weeks. The same nest is rarely used in later years.
- When one member of the pair dies, the surviving woodpecker usually finds another mate. That is one of the main ways that new individuals can breed and hold their own territory.
- The oldest known pileated woodpecker lived more than 12 years.



*Pileated Woodpecker/USFWS*