

dant bird was possible. Eventually, rewards were offered to anyone who could locate a living bird in the wild. On September 1, 1914, a 29-year old female named Martha died in the Cincinnati Zoo and, with her, the end of the species. There is little doubt that Islanders too killed this bird for food, for they were good eating, but in addition to direct killing, habitat destruction may also have driven them from P.E.I. They were birds of the deciduous forests and by the late 1800's land clearing had reached a peak on the Island. The magnificent forests described by Cartier were a thing of the past.

Two other forest dwelling species also disappeared from the Island as the forests were cleared - the Pileated Woodpecker and the Spruce Grouse. Both, however, may still be found on the adjacent mainland. Documentation for the occurrence of the Spruce Grouse is sketchy at best. No preserved specimens exist to confirm its existence here and sight records are vague, probably due to possible confusion with our only other grouse species, the Ruffed Grouse or "native partridge", as it is sometimes called. W.E. Godfrey (1954) in his publication 'Birds of Prince Edward Island' gave the species status on the Island as hypothetical, for he could find no definite information in the literature to establish its occurrence here. Bain (1891) however, stated unequivocally that it was present at the time he wrote but MacSwain (1908) heard only second-hand from elderly sportsmen that it was present. Dwight (1893) was told by other gunners that it was not found here. In any case, the species is not found here today. It is a bird of the coniferous forest and, unfortunately, it is an amazingly unwary bird, making it a particularly easy target. One can reportedly walk up to a bird sitting in a tree, which may be the reason for another name given to it, "fool hen".

Documentation for the Pileated Woodpecker on P.E.I. is better. This magnificent bird is the largest Canadian woodpecker, the size of a crow, with prominent red crest and flashing black and white wings when it flies. An inhabitant of large forest tracts, it was once common on the Island. At Bain's (1891) time however, it was only rarely seen and no one knows when it finally disappeared. Hope remains that Pileated Woodpeckers may once again occur here. In 1963 Captain E. Holdway reported seeing two flying offshore from Wood Islands and in the early 1980's a blueberry picker in southern Kings County reportedly saw a woodpecker "the size of a crow with a red head". Indeed, if the species were to be found here again, Kings County with its large tracts of woodland may be the expected location for its return.

Geoff will be continuing this article on Birds of the Island's Past in the next newsletter, dealing with the water birds that are no longer found on Prince Edward Island.

