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## PILEATED WOODPECKER - AN UPDATE

by Dwayne L. Sabine

The Pileated Woodpecker (Dryocopus pileatus), once a year-around resident of Prince Edward Island, was apparently extirpated from the Island sometime in the last century (Godfrey, 1954). The clearing of much of the Island for agriculture and the harvesting of most of the remaining timberland for lumber and firewood undoubtedly destroyed much of the former habitat of this species. However, recent trends in land use have caused the proportion of wooded land on Prince Edward Island to increase as former farmlands revert back to forest. This increase has perhaps allowed Pileated Woodpeckers to regain a position in the bird community of the Island.

In issue number 98 of the Island Naturalist, Geoff Hogan discussed recent evidence that Pileated Woodpeckers are again present on P.E.I. Since that time, additional information suggesting the occurrence of this species has surfaced to support this. Evidence in the form of borings has turned up in scattered locations throughout the Island. In addition, there have been several sightings of the actual birds reported, all in Kings County (Iris, Harmony Junction, and Fortune River) with the exception of one bird sighted near O'Leary in Prince County.

Although Pileated Woodpeckers are definitely once again present on the Island, they remain extremely uncommon. During the past two summers I have been completing bird surveys throughout Prince Edward Island and, despite being in the woods almost every day for five months, I have seen only one bird of this species. This sighting occurred on the 20th of June, 1990 when I observed a Pileated Woodpecker fly across a small valley near Iris, Kings County. Interestingly enough, fresh borings indicative of this species were reported to Rosemary Curley last month from nearby Mount Vernon. My fieldwork, as well as that of Scott Makepeace during the course of similar work, has revealed the distinctive borings of Pileated Woodpeckers at several locations across the Island including Strathgartney, Springton, and a number of locations in the Montague River watershed. However, the most tantalizing evidence to date that these birds do breed here was found in the Townsend Woodlot, an old growth hardwood stand near Harmony Junction in Kings County. In the Spring of 1988, Stephen Farmer, Doug Kelly, and Mel Wilson, closely observed a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers in the woodlot. A search by myself in July, 1989 revealed no birds, but many fresh borings were present. Regrettably, another search in June, 1990 turned up no recent signs of these birds in this woodlot.

Townsend Woodlot would seem to offer prime nesting habitat for Pileated Woodpeckers. Bent (1964) describes the average height on 33 nests in his records to be 45 feet, with the lowest nest situated 15 feet above the ground. The point where the nest hole was drilled ordinarily measured 15 to 20 inches in diameter. Although trees of these dimensions would be quite uncommon in most of Prince Edward Island, they are abundant in Townsend Woodlot. Another apparent advantage of the woodlot is that it is part of a much larger continuous area of forest. Pileated Woodpeckers seem to prefer these large tracts of unbroken forest, although they will sometimes utilize other areas.