

FEBUARY 1 - 14, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

MASTER CARPENTERS

Have you ever seen a woodpecker carve out a hole for a nest or chisel his way into a tree to find a grub to eat? Woodpeckers in general are considered master carpenters. They are called "Keystone Species" due to the fact that they provide a critical role in creating habitat for other wildlife. Abandoned woodpecker nest-holes become nests for squirrels, owls or a nesting hole for a Wood Duck or Tree Swallow.



Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus*,
looking for grubs, © Dick Harlow

With steady, resounding whacks of its chisel-like bill, a woodpecker, regardless of size, excavates a nesting cavity. In the image below, the hole is rather small; but this Pileated is looking for grubs and some of the ways he is able to find the grubs is by digging deeper into the wood. On the other hand, if the hole is to be made for a nest it will be made higher in the tree. A pair of woodpeckers will use a nesting hole for one nesting season, carving out a new one the following spring. That hole in the second or third season could likely be a home for owls. Unlike most birds whose nests are good for just one season, the woodpecker's cavity will have a long and lasting "career"!

In a woodland area bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and wrens along with some mammals will make use of these excavations. If there are a series of dead trees all of which have woodpecker nest holes, one could see many birds using these cavities. To use a phrase from someone else "the snags could become a multi-level condominium for a whole host of wildlife. A venerable, dead tree, broken off at the top and perforated with multiple cavities, may actually be one of the most valuable trees in the forest." Simple choices will help the environment! Leaving snags in the woods provides trees that woodpeckers can nest in and thus provide future cavities for wildlife.

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Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus*,
© Dick Harlow



Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Melanerpes carolinus*,
Male, © Dick Harlow

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Hairy Woodpecker, *Picooides villosus*, Male,
© Dick Harlow

We have six woodpeckers here at EastView: Pileated Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. There are two other woodpeckers found in Northern Vermont, the Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. However, you would find them either in coniferous forests of the northern Green Mountains or in the Northeast Kingdom.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Red Fox Tracks
Eastern Coyote Tracks
Vole tunnels

Weather Tidbits

Month of FEBRUARY 1-14, 2020

[*All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).*](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 36.0 mm or 1.4 inches

Overcast Days: 8