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Source: *The Wilson Bulletin*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (Jun., 2001), pp. 249-250

Published by: [Wilson Ornithological Society](#)

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Wilson Bull., 113(2), 2001, pp. 249–250

Pileated Woodpecker Scavenges on a Carcass in Missouri

Jorge Servín,^{1,4} Susan Lyndaker Lindsey,² and Bette A. Loiselle³

ABSTRACT.—An observation of opportunistic scavenging by a female Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) in Missouri is reported. The bird visited a captive wolf enclosure and tore cartilage and muscle from a large fresh beef bone and consumed it immediately. The Pileated Woodpecker vigilantly observed the resident wolves during her foraging and left the enclosure at their approach. This is thought to be the first observation of a Pileated Woodpecker scavenging meat in such a fashion. *Received 1 Sep. 2000, accepted 12 Jun. 2001.*

The Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) is the largest extant woodpecker in North America. Its diet consists primarily of insects, including carpenter ants (*Camponotus* spp.), larvae of wood-boring beetles (Cerambycidae), termites (*Termes* spp.), and others (Beal 1895, Hoyt 1957). During fall, however, mast and a variety of fruits commonly are consumed (Beal 1895, Conner 1981, Hoyt 1957, Short 1982). Here we report an observation of opportunistic scavenging behavior of a female Pileated Woodpecker. The observation occurred at the Tyson Research Center (38° 31' N, 90° 33' W), located 40 km southwest of St. Louis in St. Louis County, Missouri. Elevation at this site ranges from 137 to 244 m, with an annual mean temperature of 11°C. The Center is in the Ozark border division (Nigh et al. 1992), and maturing oak-hickory forest covers 85% of the area (Zimmerman and Wagner 1979). Red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white oak (*Q. alba*), and hickory (*Carya* spp.) are the dominant tree species on north and east slopes, with eastern redcedar

(*Juniperus virginiana*) on south and west facing slopes (Zimmerman and Wagner 1979). Tyson Research Center also houses the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center, and it was during observations of captive wolves (*Canis lupus*) at the facility that the scavenging behavior of the woodpecker was noted.

On 6 April 2000, at 10:28, a female Pileated Woodpecker landed on a mature white oak inside the wolf enclosure. The woodpecker perched on the trunk and hitched down to the base of the tree. Then the bird jumped to the ground and hopped to a large fresh beef (*Bos taurus*) bone that had been supplied to the wolves. The Pileated Woodpecker climbed onto the bone and proceeded to hit it with its bill using strong, powerful blows. This allowed the bird to break off pieces of cartilage and muscle which were consumed immediately. The woodpecker continued to remove pieces of muscle that were approximately the same length as her beak. This behavior lasted for 3 min. During this time the woodpecker kept viewing the wolves. When the wolves moved toward the bone, the woodpecker flew up and perched on the nearest tree, then climbed up the trunk and remained at 2 m height for 5 min. She then flew from the enclosure into the forest. Observations on the wolves continued for 2 h, during which time the woodpecker did not return to the enclosure.

We found no records of scavenging by Pileated Woodpeckers in a review of papers on food and feeding habits. Carpenter ants apparently are a preferred food item, and these ants, together with beetles, termites, and caterpillars comprise approximately 60% of its diet (Beal 1895, Conner 1981, Hoyt 1957). Vegetable matter (fruits, berries, and nuts) make up approximately 27% of the diet (Beal 1895, Conner 1981, Fleming et al. 1999, Hoyt 1957, Short 1982). They also are known to feed on suet at bird feeders (Bull and Jackson 1995). Given the omnivorous diet of the

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woodpecker, opportunistic foraging on a carcass is not surprising. To our knowledge, this is the first report of a Pileated Woodpecker scavenging meat in such a fashion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to J. Blake for comments on the manuscript and the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center for permission to observe the captive wolves. JS received support in the form of a sabbatical grant from Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología No. 990127, and from the Instituto de Ecología, A.C., under Project No. 902-06.

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Wilson Bull., 113(2), 2001, pp. 250–253

Interactions Between Nesting Pileated Woodpeckers and Wood Ducks

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ABSTRACT.—We observed interactions between a nesting pair of Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*) and what appeared to be four pairs of Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*). Wood Ducks regularly approached and attempted to enter an active Pileated Woodpecker nest cavity that contained three fully feathered young Pileated Woodpeckers. The male Pileated Woodpecker often perched on a snag near their nest cavity to guard the entrance from Wood Ducks. Female Wood Ducks attempted to enter the Pileated Woodpecker nest cavity on at least 12 occasions and typically were intercepted by the male Pileated Woodpecker before they reached the lip of the nest cavity. On two occasions the male Pileated Woodpecker entered his nest cavity and forcibly evicted female Wood Ducks that had slipped into the cavity. These incidents suggest that large cavities in snags may be in high

demand by Wood Ducks during the nesting season. Our observations suggest that some Pileated Woodpeckers may be able to resist attempts by Wood Ducks to usurp nest cavities during the breeding season. *Received 27 Oct. 2000, accepted 25 Apr. 2001.*

Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*) are unique among North American woodpeckers because they are the only extant species that excavates large (>45 cm deep) cavities for nest and roost sites (Conner 1974, Bull and Jackson 1995). Their large cavities are used by a wide variety of both small and large birds and mammals that are primary and secondary cavity users throughout the species range (Hoyt 1948, Hoyt 1957, Conner 1978, Evans and Conner 1979, McClelland 1979, Bonar 2000). Historically, Ivory-billed Woodpeckers (*Campephilus principalis*) also provided large cavities (Tanner 1942) for secondary cavity users in the southern U.S., particularly in hardwood forests within and adjacent to wet-

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