

Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

In the early 1900s, deforestation had significantly reduced the numbers of Pileated Woodpeckers found within Ohio and they were in danger of completely disappearing from the state. This magnificent woodpecker was almost completely extirpated from the western and central counties, and only scattered pairs remained along the entire Allegheny Plateau (Jones 1903). Fortunately, their populations have slowly but steadily increased during the 20th century. The greater availability of suitable habitats, particularly in the unglaciated counties, and the woodpecker's increased tolerance of living near humans has resulted in a remarkable recovery. This recovery was described in detail by Peterjohn (1989a), and will only be briefly summarized here.

Local increases were evident in eastern Ohio during the 1920s and 1930s. By the mid-1930s, Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 43 counties west through Brown, Highland, Ross, Fairfield, Licking, Knox, Ashland, Medina, and Cuyahoga. They were rare residents in most of these counties, but became locally fairly common in Muskingum County (Hicks 1937). Pileateds continued to increase within this range during the 1940s and 1950s, but did not begin to expand westward until the 1960s. By the early 1970s, these woodpeckers were firmly established in southwestern Ohio and the central counties near Columbus. Their numbers continued to expand in northwestern Ohio during the 1980s, but this expansion has been very slow due to a shortage of suitable forests in this intensively farmed portion of the state.

The statewide distribution of Pileated Woodpeckers during the Atlas Project reflects this pattern of range expansion. They were recorded from 417 priority blocks representing 54.6% of the statewide total, but most of these records were concentrated in the southern and eastern counties. Pileateds were most widely distributed in the Unglaciated Plateau physiographic region with records from 94.3% of the priority blocks. They were also widespread in the Glaciated Plateau and Illinoian Till Plain regions where they were found in 75.0 and 69.6% of the regional priority blocks respectively. However, these woodpeckers became locally scarce near large cities and within the intensively farmed lands within these regions. The number of records declined dramatically in the other physiographic regions, and Pileateds were unrecorded in 12 western and central Ohio counties. While they were discovered in 26.9% of the blocks in the Till Plain region, most records were from counties bordering the Allegheny Plateau and Illinoian Till Plain. Fewer Pileateds occurred in the Lake Plain region with only widely scattered records in 7.4% of the priority blocks.

On Breeding Bird Survey routes, Pileated Woodpeckers are most numerous along the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau. However, relatively few individuals are recorded on the routes in the other physiographic regions where these data are insufficient to accurately establish their relative abundance.

Breeding Pileateds prefer extensive tracts of mature forests, normally woodlands exceeding 100 acres in size. They are not restricted to large woodlands, however. In recent years, they

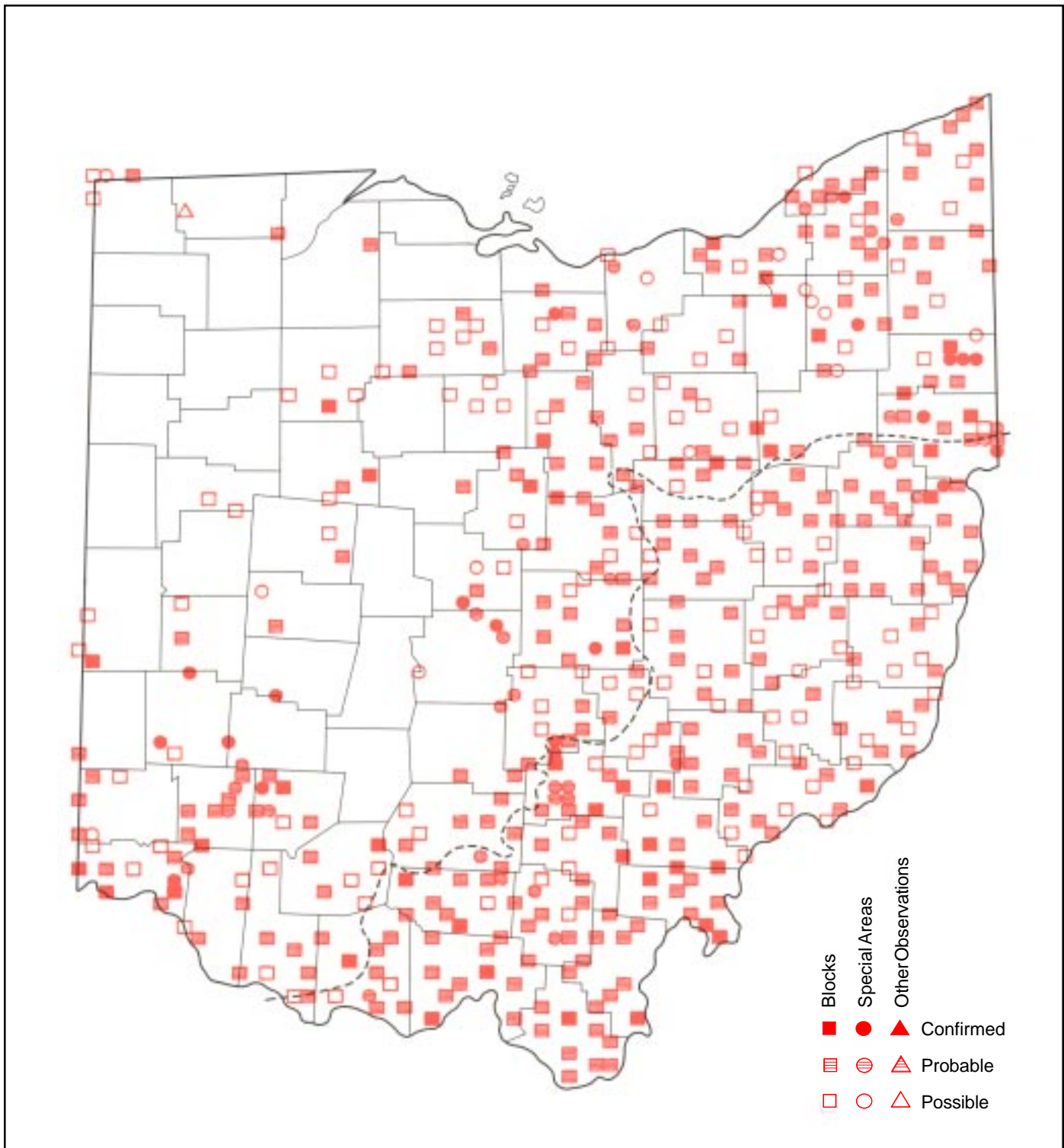


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have established territories in areas with scattered 10–30 acre woodlots separated by agricultural fields. They may also be found along mature wooded riparian corridors, but prefer 100–200+ foot wide corridors rather than single rows of trees. An individual may occasionally forage in wooded edge habitats, but Pileateds do not normally wander far from mature woods.

Pileated Woodpecker nests are most frequently found at heights of 25–50 feet in large dead deciduous trees, but they will occasionally utilize live trees and conifers. Nest construction may begin during late March in southern Ohio, but is normally most evident during April and early May. Nests with eggs have been reported between April 18 and May 21 (Mathena et al. 1984, Williams 1950). Most nests with young have been discovered during May and the first half of June. Recently fledged young have been reported as early as May 29 (Williams 1950), but most appear during June. Adults accompanied by dependent young during the first half of July may represent renesting attempts.

Nesting pairs were difficult to confirm during the Atlas Project with records in only 44 of 417 priority blocks. Active nests were discovered in 27 blocks while recently fledged young were noted in 6 additional blocks. The “30” coded was not used in any block, and the other confirmed records were scattered among the other categories. The majority of Atlas Project records pertained to probable breeders, primarily territorial individuals or pairs in suitable habitats.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	7	7.4	1.7	<0.1
Till Plain	271	73	26.9	17.5	<0.1
Ill. Till Plain	46	32	69.6	7.7	<0.1
Glaciated Plateau	140	105	75.0	25.2	<0.1
Unglaciated Plateau	212	200	94.3	48.0	1.8

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	417	54.6%
Confirmed	44	10.6%
Probable	252	60.4%
Possible	121	29.0%