

# *Iowa Outdoors*

*Iowa Department of Natural Resources*

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

## **PILEATED WOODPECKERS PROVIDE SUMMER ENTERTAINMENT FOR STATE PARK USERS**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

With its zebra-striped head, crow sized body, and maniacally raucous call, the pileated woodpecker is hard to mistake for any other bird. When it comes to woodland birdlife, the species ranks high on my list of favorites.

But getting a close look at one is never easy. As elusive as a spring gobbler and as shy as an emerging morel, the pileated woodpecker is an inhabitant of the deep forest. A master at avoiding humans, this is one forest species that is more often heard than seen.

Evidence of their passing is easier to locate. Most common are the feeding cavities where the birds have conducted their relentless, lifelong quest for carpenter ants. The equivalent of feathered jack hammers; pileateds use powerful chiseled beaks to whack away three and four-inch hunks of bark and wood. On a calm day, the noise can be heard for a quarter mile.

Once the heavy work is done and the easy ants have been captured and swallowed, pileateds use their long sticky tongues to probe tunnels for fugitives. By the time the task is complete, hardwood trunks often bear ten-inch deep scars that measure up to three feet in length. Pileateds also attack rotting logs. When these excavations are finished, the fallen trunks are as completely shredded as if they had been visited by foraging bears.

From the woodpecker infested bayous of southern Louisiana to northern forests, I've been attempting to spy on pileateds ever since I saw and heard my first one at

Yellow River State Forest in 1965. For more than thirty years I've dreamed of photographing an active nest. After several near misses and countless seasons of failure, my opportunity finally came last winter when DNR Conservation Officer, Bill Fribley called to say that he had located an active pair in the woodlands of Ledges State Park.

It was late March and the pair had already excavated two potential nesting cavities about a hundred yards apart. Setting a ground blind near the most promising location, I was delighted to observe [and photograph] both adults as they visited the site. Although I'd been through the drill before, I had a good feeling about the future of this site.

In order to avoid disturbance, I stayed away from the pair for the next two months. When I returned in late May, the territory was barely recognizable. Instead of stark and open, the forest had become closed, dark and green.

I was delighted to find the pileated pair still on territory. Better yet was the fact they were busily engaged in feeding three offspring. Like the forest itself, the pair had undergone a profound change. Burdened with the responsibility of providing an endless supply of ants and ant grubs to their open mawed young, the adults had lost much of their wariness. As long as human intruders displayed a modicum of respect, the birds showed little concern and presented an ideal opportunity for close up study of this unique bird species.

When the weekend arrived, I returned for serious viewing. The sun was still rising on a perfect morning as I settled in behind the camera tripod. I had literally been waiting for years to enjoy this event and I planned on making a full day of it. To celebrate the occasion, I'd even gone so far as to bring my own ants for lunch. Actually, it was a collection of peanut butter filled celery sticks topped with rows of partially imbedded dark raisins. My wife, Carol refers to the taste treat as 'Ants on a Log.' All things considered, no meal could have been more fitting for the occasion.

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## **NESTING FORECAST POINTS TO INCREASE IN PHEASANT NUMBERS**

Has Iowa's sagging pheasant population hit bottom? Reviewing weather data from this past winter and spring, Department of Natural Resources upland wildlife biologist Todd Bogenschutz is cautiously optimistic. "Our pheasant population typically shows increases following mild winters and springs that are drier and warmer than normal. Pheasant numbers could increase 20-40 percent this year," he said.

That forecast follows the lowest pheasant harvest on record in Iowa. Hunters took just 383,000 ring-necked roosters in the 2008-09 season; following one of the snowiest winters and one of the wettest springs in Iowa history.

For 2009, though, an average winter and spring are good news as the pheasant hatch heads into its mid-June peak. "At this point, it is likely we will have good populations in northwest, north central and west central Iowa, with better populations in

the remainder of the state, compared to 2008,” notes Bogenschutz. “These regions will still show pheasant numbers below what hunters would like to see, though.”

The spring forecast is based on weather data from the National Oceanic and Aeronautical Administration, showing December through March snow cover, along with April and May rain levels. Snowfall was below normal in west central and southwest Iowa. East central and northeast Iowa snowfall was above normal. Northeast Iowa was also clipped with above average rainfall...as was central Iowa.

Bogenschutz eyes Iowa’s August roadside counts as the final pre-season indicator of a pheasant comeback. Wildlife workers and conservation officers comb Iowa’s back roads during the first week of August, tallying pheasants and other upland game on more than 200 30-mile routes.

Even with an average or above average hatch, Iowa’s lack of habitat remains a limiting factor. In the peak years of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the 1990s, over five million acres of grassy areas that could be utilized by pheasants. That dropped to 3.3 million acres this past year.

“The CRP provides the majority of pheasant habitat in Iowa today,” says Bogenschutz. “Yet we will lose the equivalent of a one mile wide strip from Council Bluffs to Davenport this year. It would be beneficial for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to offer general CRP enrollment again, for 2010.”

**Media Contact: Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-432-2823.**

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## **STATE CAPITOL PEREGRINE FALCONS FOCUS OF JUNE 24 PROGRAM**

The public is invited to a program on peregrine falcons at the east side of the State Capitol at 11 a.m., June 24, including the possibility of seeing young peregrines learning to fly.

Falcon partners from around the Midwest who have provided hard work and financial support will be included in this program. Presenters will be encouraging input from the public concerning proposal to upgrade peregrine falcon status in Iowa from Endangered Species to a Species of Special Concern.

This year there are 13 nesting pairs around Iowa from the first successful nesting attempt in 1993 in Des Moines and Cedar Rapids. Sites include natural cliffs at Lansing and Waukon Junction on the Mississippi River, Agri Bunge Elevator, in McGregor, MidAmerican Energy headquarters, in Davenport, and Louisa Generating Station, Alliant Energy plant at Chillicothe and Clinton, US Bank building, in Cedar Rapids, American Republic building, in Des Moines, Great River Bridge, in Burlington, and I-80 and I-280 bridges, at the Quad Cities.

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## **IOWA INCREASES REQUIREMENTS TO CLAIM RESIDENCY TO HUNT, FISH**

DES MOINES – Beginning July 1, the minimum requirement to claim Iowa as a state of residence will increase from 30 consecutive days where Iowa is the principle and primary residence, to 90 consecutive days, before someone may purchase a resident hunting, fishing or trapping privilege.

The new residency requirements were approved during the 2009 legislative session and signed by Iowa Governor Chet Culver. It becomes effective July 1.

The new residency rule also specifically excludes people from claiming residency for a special or temporary purpose which includes engaging in hunting, fishing or trapping.

Owning land in Iowa, having an Iowa driver's license or registering a vehicle or to vote does not mean a person is an Iowa resident.

The new residency requirements can be found in the *2009-10 Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations* booklet available in early August at locations where hunting and fishing licenses are sold, DNR offices statewide, and on the Web at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov).

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