

the osprey

Monmouth County Audubon Society

www.monmouthaudubon.org

Over **50 Years** of Birds and Conservation

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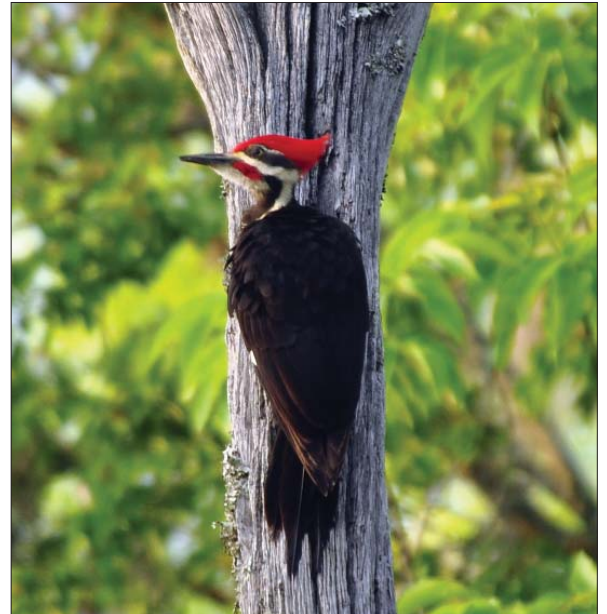
Monmouth County's most elusive woodpecker

by Robert Henschel

Illustrator Walter Lantz and his wife were enjoying a peaceful honeymoon in a California forest when a bird began pounding relentlessly on their rustic cabin. In fact, it drummed so determinedly that it put holes in the roof, allowing the rain to pour in. His patience pressed to the limit, Walter went for his gun. Luckily for the bird, his wife Grace provided a decidedly kinder solution: channel his frustration onto paper and turn the pesky creature into a cartoon character. And that is how Woody Woodpecker was "born," 77 years ago.

As with any new creation, things evolve over time. The bird disturbing Walter's woodland tranquility was an Acorn Woodpecker, a species he felt didn't capture the annoying disposition he was searching for. Instead, he found inspiration in its relative, a larger bird with a flamboyant crest and a loud, grating voice. With several creative touches and considerable poetic license, Woody became, in essence, a Pileated Woodpecker with an attitude.

I presume that every one of you added Woody to your life list of cartoon birds long ago - along with Heckle & Jeckle (yellow-billed magpies), Daffy (a Mallard, I suppose), and the Roadrunner. But, as I've discovered over the years, many of you have never crossed paths with a real



Pileated Woodpecker / Animalia Life

Monmouth County Pileated Woodpecker. Unfortunately, due to habitat destruction, finding many woodland birds becomes increasingly difficult, particularly species like wood-warblers and vireos which winter in South America. The good news is the Pileated is not one of the imperiled species. In fact, their population appears to be increasing here in Monmouth County.

With its black back, white crescents on a black under wing, and red crest, you'll recognize a Pileated Woodpecker as soon as you see one. It's a little smaller than a crow, more massive than the other six Monmouth County woodpeckers, and the only crested or "pileated" species. (Our second largest, the Northern Flicker, is a full five inches shorter.) Distinguishing males from females may require binoculars; he has a red "mustache," while hers is black.

Knowing its habitat is the key to finding any bird, and with this particular woodpecker that means forested areas -

(continued on Page 3)



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The Osprey is published 5x per year by the Monmouth County Audubon Society, local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to promote the awareness, appreciation and conservation of natural resources through activism and educational outreach, and by representing the National Audubon Society in Monmouth County, NJ. Inquiries concerning the organization, newsletter, letters to the editor or material submitted for consideration are encouraged and may be sent to: P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701 E-mail: info@monmouthaudubon.org

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➤ **In The News...**

What do birds do during a total eclipse?

Approximately every 18 months a total solar eclipse is visible somewhere on the surface of the Earth. During previous total solar eclipses, numerous observers have reported interesting animal behavior – especially describing birds. With the advent of citizen science projects like eBird, scientists now have the opportunity to examine bird behaviors as reported by a large number of observers almost immediately and at a much grander scale.



Researchers focused on 1,350 checklists submitted from the time of maximum eclipse. There were a number of interesting observations, including:

- Several observers noted aerial feeders like swallows and swifts appearing at low altitudes as the midday light waned – possibly descending to roost.
- Doppler radar imagery from South Carolina seems to corroborate this, showing aerial animals (insects and birds) getting lower to the ground as the eclipse progressed, then taking to the air again as the eclipse ended.
- Observations of nocturnal birds like Common Nighthawks and owls were widespread during totality.
- Nocturnal migrants acted as if they were set to depart for a migratory journey.
- There were lots of reports of confused birds flying erratically, landing abruptly, and generally not knowing what to do.

The full story is available on the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology website.

MCAS survey still available online



We are continuing to collect responses for our online membership survey, and we would like you to help shape the future of MCAS. Just type this link into your web browser and complete the 10-minute survey. Let us know what you think about our field trips and programs, the website, the newsletter, and everything else we do. Your comments will help us focus on your priorities in the future. Grab a cup of coffee, type in <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H2KRKTR>, and let us know what you think!

Chairmen needed for open positions

We are in serious need of several volunteers to oversee some of our key positions. Longtime Program Chairman Wendy Malmid will be stepping down in May, and we will need someone new to arrange for speakers for our monthly programs. Wendy will help get you started. Also related to our programs, we also need a Hospitality Chairman. This person is responsible for bringing refreshments to our programs (you are reimbursed for the food). Finally, the position of Education Chairman has been vacant for some time. This person oversees the Audubon Adventures program with local schools.

If you are interested in making a difference for MCAS and the community, please contact president Colette Buchanan at info@monmouthaudubon.org.

Special thanks

Since the last two newsletters were published fairly close together, we have only two people to thank for donations in this issue. But your name could be here in the next issue with your donation! Special thanks this issue go to Joshua Schor, MD, and Judith Bornemann for their donations. As always, we are grateful for your help.

by Harden Fowler

➤ **A better environment and conservation are worth fighting for**

This summer I viewed the new Al Gore documentary, "An Inconvenient Sequel," and I was very impressed on several levels. Al Gore presented a very real problem in a very professional manner. The science of climate change is fully supported by decades of evidence and needs positive action from all nations. It is NOT going away, only worsening. The groundwork has been started by virtually all nations, except for our recent withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord to reduce carbon emissions.

Mr. Gore asks three simple questions: "Do we have the will, can we act, and will we act to lessen the effects of climate change?" The answer to all three should be YES.

The recent climate change report by government scientists makes the warning implicit: withdrawing from the Paris accord, denying the role of human activity in climate change, and doubling down on the dying coal industry, which produces some of the most harmful fossil fuels, is clearly not a good deal for America.

Why have the importance of a cleaner environment and conservation efforts been devalued by some of our leadership? In the past, our leadership has heeded the scientific evidence and the voices of grassroots environmental groups, which support conservation and cleaner energy programs. It seems the leadership in Washington now plans to abandon any progress made in favor of immediate, short-term gains for a wealthy few, ignoring the evidence. The President and the Congressional leadership have appointed leaders in several key agencies who have supported anti-environment positions during their careers in industry, challenging the very agency they now lead.

Without control, oceans are warming and on the rise; fresh water and air quality are worsening; weather patterns are growing more erratic and dangerous; bird migration is disrupted; natural areas are threatened; and humans and wildlife are suffering.

It does not have to be an either/or proposition. It can be a compromise with cleaner energy, thoughtful land use and strong conservation ethics working alongside changes in industry that create financial gain.

Each of us should fight for the environment and conservation for today and the future. Like many groups, MCAS supports conservation and often signs on to support various local and national issues. We urge each of our members to contact environmental groups at all levels on their own behalf in support of climate change initiatives before it is too late.



Clayton Park / R. Henschel

Woodpecker (continued)

either deciduous or coniferous – with a good number of especially tall trees, a significant number of which are DEAD. Big old decaying trees, particularly fallen ones, are the Pileated's grocery stores. They love boring beetle larvae, termites and assorted small fruits and nuts. Their prime food is carpenter ants. In search of insects hiding within the soft dead wood, the Pileated chisels large, vertical 4- to 6-inch oblong holes. At Tatum County Park in Middletown, you'll find them throughout the forest.

The same holds true for Huber Woods and Clayton Parks, two other locales that have had nesting pairs in recent years. Another place to walk, look and listen for Pileateds is along Cooper Road in Middletown. Here the land is private property, but if you stay on the road and visit on a quiet day, you'll find them if they're in the neighborhood. In this bird's case, his "neighborhood" is especially large; the typical Pileated territory is 150 to 200 acres. If you find a nesting pair in the spring, be sure to give them their space. Some nests are only 15 feet above the ground. Others might be as high as 70 feet. A pair can have as many as four offspring who will stay with Mom and Dad for 3-5 months, departing for a life on their own in the fall.

In terms of ecological significance, the Pileated Woodpecker is considered a "keystone species," which means it has "a disproportionately large effect on its environment relative to its abundance." The Pileated never reuses its nest cavities, so these "vacancies" become shelters and nests for other forest inhabitants such as Screech Owls, Wood Ducks, squirrels and an assortment of other small birds and mammals.

Late fall and winter are excellent times to find a real Woody Woodpecker. The Pileated doesn't migrate, so it'll be somewhere in the parks mentioned above. When you first meet one, I guarantee it'll be an experience you'll remember.



**Monmouth County
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➤ **Membership Application**

Please enroll me as a member of the Monmouth County Audubon Society (Q04) and/or the National Audubon Society. My check is enclosed for:

- \$10 **Regular Chapter member** (*payable to MCAS*)
- \$20 **Chapter Sustaining member** - all funds stay in our area, helping us to support local efforts and provide services here in Monmouth County. (*payable to MCAS*)
- \$20 **National Audubon Society member** - includes Chapter membership (rate for new members only; renewable at \$35; *check payable to National Audubon Society*)
- Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities.
- Do not add my name to the mailing list; I will read the newsletter online.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Please return your check (see above) along with application to: Monmouth County Audubon Society, P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701.

Q04

Membership questions? Email us at info@monmouthaudubon.org.

Please check our website for updates on possible program cancellations due to weather.

➤ **coming up**

- Sat., Oct. 7 8 am - 5 pm
Sandy Hook "Big Sit," Migration Watch platform nr North Pond, Parking Lot "M"
- Wed., Oct. 11 8:00 pm
NJ Bald Eagle Project, Robert Somes
- Sat., Oct. 14 10:00 am
Fall birding at Sandy Hook, meet in old Visitor Center lot, 1.8 mi. N of entrance
- Wed., Nov. 8 8:00 pm
Return of the Raven, Rick Radis
- Sat., Nov. 11 8:00 am
Bird Banding Demonstration, grassy field south of parking lot "M," Sandy Hook
- Sat., Dec. 9 10:00 am
Late fall birds of Sandy Hook, meet in old Visitor Center lot, 1.8 miles N of entrance
- Wed., Dec. 13 8:00 pm
Avian Rehabilitation, or How to Live with a Loon in Your Bathtub, Giselle Smisko

* Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month Sept.-May at the Knights of Columbus hall, 200 Fair Haven Road, Fair Haven. Meetings are always open to the public, and refreshments are served.