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Identifying and Reporting an Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Step 1: Distribution

Pileated Woodpecker



Distribution of the Pileated Woodpecker.
Source: [The Birds of North America Online](http://TheBirdsOfNorthAmericaOnline.com).

Ivory-billed Woodpecker



Approximate boundary of the early historical range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the United States and Cuba. Adapted from Tanner 1942 and Jackson 2004. Source: [The Birds of North America Online](http://TheBirdsOfNorthAmericaOnline.com).

Historical Range

The historical range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker included the following states:

Alabama	Kentucky	Oklahoma
Arkansas	Louisiana	South Carolina
Florida	Mississippi	Tennessee
Georgia	Missouri	Texas
Illinois	North Carolina	

If your sighting occurred in one of these states, please [continue with step 2 »](#)

If your sighting is not within one of these states, you probably saw a Pileated Woodpecker. For more information about the Pileated Woodpecker, please visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [Online Bird Guide](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Pileated_Woodpecker.html) (http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Pileated_Woodpecker.html).

We hope you'll record your sightings of Pileated Woodpeckers at [eBird](#), a free online checklist program that allows you to contribute sightings of any bird species to a continentwide database accessible by scientists, conservationists, and other bird watchers.

Step 2: Habitat Comparison

If your sighting is not within one of the states listed in [step 1](#), you probably saw a Pileated Woodpecker.

Pileated Woodpecker

- Variety of mature forest types
- Secondary forest -- deciduous or coniferous
- Rural or suburban neighborhoods with tall trees
- Parks or golf courses with tall trees

Ivory-billed Woodpecker

- Extensive, mature bottomland hardwood forest
- Mature or old-growth cypress forest
- Mature or old-growth southern pine forest
- Areas of dying timber

Habitat of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Ivory-billed Woodpeckers inhabit very large tracts of mature forest that are often associated with swamps or river systems (see photos below).



Stand of cypress trees in White River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Clark Jones.



Flooded stand of hardwoods in Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Melanie Driscoll.

If your observation occurred within the range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and in appropriate habitats, then [proceed to Step 3](#) »

If the bird you saw was in a sparsely forested area, such as your backyard or on a golf course, then it was probably a Pileated Woodpecker. For more information about the Pileated Woodpecker, please visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [Online Bird Guide](#).

Step 3: Field Marks

If your sighting is not within one of the states listed in [step 1](#) or in the appropriate habitat as listed in [step 2](#) you probably saw a Pileated Woodpecker.

The [Ivory-billed woodpecker](#) is the largest woodpecker in North America other than the imperial woodpecker of Mexico, which is feared to be extinct. The [Pileated Woodpecker](#) (*Dryocopus pileatus*) is the second largest and is surprisingly common in many parts of the United States, including all areas formerly inhabited by ivory-bills. If you are seeing a large black-and-white woodpecker, it is important to carefully examine the field marks and behavior to distinguish between these superficially similar species.



Perched Pileated Woodpecker (male)



Perched Ivory-billed Woodpecker (male)

Key identifiable differences:

	Pileated Woodpecker	Ivory-billed Woodpecker
Wings	White bases of primary and secondary feathers (the outermost wing feathers). Wings show dark trailing edge from above and below. Very small white patch visible on wing when perched.	White secondary and inner primary feathers (the outermost wing feathers). Wings show white trailing edge from above and below. Form large white patch where wings lay on top of back of perched bird.
Plumage markings	White line forms immediately behind bill, runs down neck, and onto the side of the bird.	White line forms below eye, runs down neck, and onto the back of the bird.
Bill	Dark horn to black, shading to yellow. Bill variable in color, often shiny, and in sunlight can reflect a lighter appearance.	Larger bill, ivory in color. However, bill color is not a good field mark because light, viewing angles, and the white cheek plumage may interfere with proper

identification.

Crest	Male: crest entirely red, with red crown extending onto forehead. Female: crest red extending only onto rear part of the crown.	Male: curved and pointed red crest with black forehead. Female: curved and pointed black crest.
Size	Length: 16-19 in. Wing span: 26-30 in.	Length: 18-20 in. Wing span: 30-33 in.
Vocalizations	Contact call is loud deep <i>kuk kuk</i> . Both sexes use a <i>yucka yucka yucka</i> call similar to that of a flicker. Listen to a higher-pitched territorial call .	Nasal <i>yank yank yank</i> has been likened to a nuthatch or a tin trumpet. Listen to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's calls and tapping .
Display Drumming	Slow powerful accelerating drums that trails off at end. Usually 2-3 seconds in duration with 1-2 series per minute (listen).	Loud distinctive 'double-rap' with the second note sounding like an echo of the first. There is about 70 miliseconds between the two notes.
Range	Distribution of the Pileated Woodpecker . (Source: The Birds of North America Online).	Approximate boundary of the early historical range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the United States and Cuba. Adapted from Tanner 1942 and Jackson 2004. (Source: The Birds of North America Online).

Based on the information on this page and in steps 1 and 2, if you think you saw an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, please [continue with step 4 »](#)

If the field marks of your bird did not correspond with those of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, you probably saw a Pileated Woodpecker. For more information about the Pileated Woodpecker, please visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [Online Bird Guide](#).