

General notes for IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER (Campephilus principalis) both sightings

(page 6 of 6, digital notes from 2004, new footnotes added 5/21/05)

Similar species - Pileated Woodpecker Dryocopus pileatus

This is a smaller blacker species that superficially can be mistaken for an Ivory-billed. The bill of the Pileated is black and smaller in proportion to its head size than these Ivory-billed's bill proportions. The Pileated has a rather pointed bill that does not appear to be blunt at the tip. The Pileated also shows white feathering coming in contact with the bill (which these two Ivory-billeds did not show). The body color of the Pileated appears mostly black when wings are folded. The body color of these Ivory-billeds showed extensive areas of white on the folded wings. The local Pileateds showed a smooth appearance to their head feathers, not a "shaggy" appearance.

Both Ivory-billeds were seen in what was formerly a large block of undisturbed mature hardwood forest (consisting mostly of beech, dogwood, maple, oak, wild black cherry and tulip poplar), adjoined by less mature hardwood/cedar/white pine mixed woodland. In the many years I hunted and traveled this wooded area, I only saw two confirmed sightings of these birds from 1970-1995. I never heard the calls of these birds (reported to sound like a toy horn) in that 25 year period. I have heard and seen Pileateds on multiple occasions. I saw Pileateds in every year between 1970 and 1995.

I now believe that I also had discovered an old unused Ivory-billed @nesting cavity in a dead tree snag (roughly 50 to 60 feet above ground level). I did not realize at the time I found this cavity that it was probably generated by an Ivory-billed and not a Pileated. I have since learned that the Pileateds usually make a large rectangular hole (which I have seen commonly). The hole entrance in question was circular and estimated to be 4 inches in diameter. A bird as large as a wood duck could easily have fit in this hole entrance. This was the only round woodpecker hole entrance I have ever seen that was of this size. The area where these sightings occurred is unfortunately now all subdivision.

I originally also contacted Roger Tory Peterson of Old Lyme, Connecticut (by typed letter on January 31, 1983) and +American Birds (by letter on December 1982, the exact date was not recorded) regarding the second sighting. Mr. Peterson was intrigued, but said he really could not do anything without hard evidence. Robert Arbib at +American Birds stated he found it impossible to believe I had seen an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. On 2/05/2003, I contacted an internet bird site belonging to National Geographic in regard to my sightings, but received no response back.

I would also like to point out that contrary to their name, both these birds had rather pale gray bills and not white or ivory bills.

Sincerely,
Steve Sheridan



@Footnote revision added as of 4/28/05. It is quite probable that this nesting cavity was actually created by a Pileated Woodpecker. +Footnote revision added as of 1/21/05. American Birds had been incorrectly identified as National Birds. The original details relating to the conversation with Robert Arbib at American Birds and the letter to Roger Tory Peterson were presumed lost after a residence move but were again found on 5/21/05.