

# WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

## PILEATED WOODPECKER

Our country's largest woodpecker often makes an appearance in Victoria Park when it flies across a road and swoops upward to land on a tree trunk. The Pileated Woodpecker's black, crow-sized body and white wing patches make a distinctive combination, but the feature that really stands out is the bird's flashy red crest ("pileus" means crest). In true woodpecker fashion, the pileated hitches its way up tree trunks testing the wood with its powerful, chisel-like beak for insects hidden beneath the bark or inside the wood. Much larger than any of Florida's other 7 woodpeckers, the pileated can't be mistaken for any other bird. (However,

before it presumably became extinct in the mid-1900s, the slightly larger Ivory-billed Woodpecker of the southeastern states bore a close resemblance to the pileated.)

Even if the pileated remains hidden in the trees its presence is often revealed by its wild “laughing” call (think Woody Woodpecker, who was modeled after the pileated) or the loud thumping sounds it makes when it pecks on a tree to find insects. Some of its rectangular feeding holes are huge and prove this bird’s amazing power. During the breeding season the male pileated (distinguished by its red “mustache”) makes a different kind of sound called “drumming” by rapping its bill against a trunk or limb at tremendous speed to attract a mate and declare its territory.

Like most of Florida’s woodpeckers, the pileated is a permanent, non-migratory resident of our state, as well as throughout its expansive range which extends all the way up into Canada.

And, unlike its close cousin, the extinct Ivory-billed woodpecker, the pileated remains common and unthreatened.