Woodpecker Facts
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These little-known facts about woodpeckers in North America will surprise everyone you know!

Pileated woodpecker, Carol Riles

1. Downy woodpeckers are the most common backyard woodpecker.

2. Pileated woodpeckers are almost as big as American crows, making them the largest member of the woodpecker family.

3. A woodpecker uses its stiff central pair of tail feathers like a bicycle kickstand to prop itself up against a tree.

4. Some woodpeckers travel in small flocks, but most remain alone.

5. The pileated woodpecker's name comes from the Latin word pileatus, which means "capped." This alludes to the bird's conspicuous crest.

6. Male and female pileated woodpeckers are equally involved in raising their young.

7. A swarm of mosquitoes at the entrance of an old woodpecker hole may indicate that a woodpecker or other warm-blooded animal is inside.

8. With their ability to become virtually invisible by flattening themselves against a tree trunk, downy woodpeckers often leave their predators barking up the wrong tree.

9. Most woodpeckers use two front toes and a back toe, along with the tail, to perch on tree trunks.

10. The red-headed woodpecker has several colorful nicknames, including flag bird, jelly coat, patriotic bird and shirttail bird.

11. The red-bellied woodpecker has also been called the zebra woodpecker, the cham-chack and the ramshack.

12. The downy woodpecker's tongue is twice as long as its head. It uses the barbs at the tip to spear insects.

13. Pileated woodpeckers may spend up to 30 days carving out an oval-shaped nesting cavity.

14. During nesting season, male pileated woodpeckers may spend 18 hours a day incubating eggs.

15. Most woodpeckers have some red on their heads, but the red-headed woodpecker is the only one with a completely red head.

16. Red-headed woodpeckers will chisel nesting cavities up to 24 inches deep in tall trees, but they'll nest in man-made birdhouses, too.

17. In the three-toed woodpeckers, the hallux (hind toe) is missing.