

Station 12: Light Gap, Pileated Nest

This station points out a "light gap" directly above in the forest canopy. A light gap is a small, well-defined area that has somehow become clear of large trees, allowing sunlight to hit the forest floor. This allows many young trees, particularly light-loving ones, to spring up. Here you can see small birches, maples, oak, and hickory.

If you look straight ahead a short way down the hill, you will see a series of oblong holes in an old dead pine tree. These were pileated woodpecker roosts or nest cavities which have since been abandoned; the woodpeckers will create a new nest for each brood and therefore a new nest cavity every year. A non-breeding pileated woodpecker, however, may create up to twelve roosting cavities in this same time span. The abandoned cavities become winter roosts for songbirds and are often adopted in the spring as prime nesting sites by a variety of other animals. Oftentimes, however, the holes you will encounter will be shallower "foraging holes" which are used by the birds to find food.

