

## A June Trip Through the Harvard Forest

BY RHEA AND EARL SMITH



S. A. GRIMES FROM N.A.S.

### Pileated Woodpeckers

poses from that center for nature study. The topography of the region consists of low ridges of about 1,000 feet elevation with peaks rising to about 1,300 feet. The slopes are well-wooded, and most of the agriculture is restricted to the upland fields, while the lowlands are boggy; in many places the streams have been impounded into ponds and reservoirs. These physical features of the eastern hills, coupled with the southern extension of some northern forest types, bring interesting birdlife to the Forest. The great hurricane of 1938 also formed new habitats by destroying most of the remaining old field pine stands and thereby creating brush-filled openings with scattered trees.

The Forest Headquarters adjoins the Fisher Museum that houses the well-known Harvard Forest Models. These models were designed in part by the late Professor R. T. Fisher, the first director of the Forest, to portray the history of the central New England forests and some of the various applications of forestry to our local conditions. The models were constructed in the studios of Guernsey and Pitman over a ten-year period and were completed in 1941.

Now let us drive south from the headquarters through Petersham and down the Barre road to the most southern part of the Forest. This is called the Slab City tract and, as it is partly in the lee of a protecting ridge, some of the old growth timber is still standing. The Swift River ripples and eddies on its rock-strewn way under the cool arched canopy of pine and hemlock,

while overhead we hear the lazy song of the black-throated green warbler and, near by, a black-throated blue. We are fortunate in seeing the burst of flame color on the breast of a Blackburnian warbler before it disappears into the heavy foliage overhead.

As we leave this pleasant trail along the river and drive back to Petersham, we see large areas of ten-year-old trees and many old stumps tilted in one direction, grim reminders of the hurricane. Passing through town on highway Number 122, toward New Salem, we come to Harvard Pond. If we drive up the old woods road on the west side the sun will be at our backs. Look! There goes a wood duck which has been feeding among the water plants, hidden from sight. His plaintive alarm note frightens several more, and there, just beyond that buttonbush clump, is a female leading three ducklings to safety. They do not realize, perhaps, that Harvard Pond and, in fact, all the Tom Swamp tract is a wildlife sanctuary. Over near the far shore is a great blue heron slowly flapping away, probably one of the birds from the rookery which is not far off.

As we go up over a low ridge and down through a blowdown area, suddenly we are attracted by the call of the olive-sided flycatcher, *hic-three-beers*, as he sits with his white shirt showing through his unbuttoned vest. He perches precariously in the top of a dead tree, and now he darts, flycatcher-fashion, after an insect. A little later in the season we can find the purple fringe orchids in the small bog at the foot of his tree.

Now let us go to the northwest corner of the Tom Swamp tract to a spruce bog where the cranberry and creeping snowberry twine over the moist sphagnum among the pitcher plants. We are greeted as we drop down the slope above the bog by a hissing *kee-aahr-rr*, when the red-tailed hawk finds us invading its domain. As it flies from its lookout and circles overhead, it rouses the kingbirds and several rise to do battle. After several attacks the hawk gives ground, and all disappear over the trees with a kingbird riding the redtail's back and striking at its head. Later in the summer we may find a young hawk, flying awkwardly at first, but soon soaring equally well with its parents. In the thick growth around the bog we hear the ethereal song of the white-throated sparrow, which we New Englanders like to interpret as *Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*.

Back now we drive past the Headquarters and out into the Prospect Hill tract, where we stop beside one of the numerous conifer plantations. Here, by kissing the back of the hand, we soon entice the two warblers with yellow rumps, the magnolia and the myrtle, away from their nesting duties. We drive through the plantation and then walk a short distance to the edge of a wild tangle of spruce, hemlock, and wind-thrown trees in a large sphagnum bog. Here we pause and soon hear the wild abandoned song of the winter wren, and while we listen we may hear in the distance the flickerlike calls of a big pileated woodpecker.

The shadows are lengthening as we return to the car and drive through the semidark tunnel formed by the trees. We stop as we come out in the open near the Headquarters and listen to the beautiful vesper symphony of the thrushes — wood, hermit, and veery. And as we listen the last rays of the sun disappear over the western hills, and we bring to a close our brief trip through the Harvard Forest.