

Natural Resource Protection News

From the Town of Canandaigua Environmental Conservation Board

The Beautiful Dead Tree

By: ECB Member, Edith Davey

Are you fortunate enough to own a dead tree? A tree far enough away from your house or other structures to not risk it causing damage if it falls? If you enjoy watching wildlife, letting it remain through the natural process of decay will reward you richly with opportunities to view the habitat created. An ecological succession of animals and plants follows the opening of a forest or border canopy.

In the order of arrival, the succession of animals harbored by a dead tree, or snag, usually begins with insects. Watching even these

small creatures is interesting as they create tunnels in the wood and under the bark for their nurseries and food

woody crevasses and under the bark of such trees.



Pileated Woodpecker on a dead tree. Image Credit: [Wikipedia](#)

storage. Female bald hornets and female native bees overwinter in

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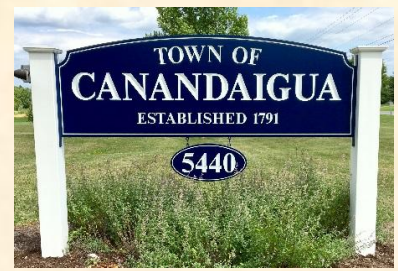
Woodpecker activity may be the first signal of the demise of a tree. Woodpeckers harvesting the ants and other insects attracted to dead trees create cavities that many birds and small animals will use for nesting. At least seven different woodpecker species are found locally. In size they range from large pileated woodpeckers to small nuthatches.

Woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, wrens, tree swallows and bluebirds all use dead tree cavities, although other species will nest in these as well. Before bluebird boxes were promoted to rescue our state bird, their declining numbers were thought

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to have resulted from the lack of available tree cavities that had been their natural home.

Hawks and owls will use tall dead trees as hunting lookouts. Look for dried owl pellets beneath these trees to detect what the bird may have caught for lunch. Bits of fir and bones in the pellets will tell you what small rodents are active in your woods.

Chipmunks and squirrels are lively residents of dead trees, and opossums, raccoons, and fox families will often use hollow logs for denning purposes. Learning to read the tracks and signs of wildlife will entertain you during a long winter's walk.

Mosses and mushrooms will appear as the roots decay, lending more variety and interest to the site. As the



Woodpecker holes in a snag. Image Credit: M. Rehemtulla. [Sourced from Wikimedia](#)

tree canopy opens after the death of a large tree, sprouts from seeds will emerge. Wildflowers (aka "weeds") will also sprout and provide some protection for young trees against browsing deer. Wild raspberry bushes provide excellent barriers against herbivore depredations and are often among the first plants to sprout as berry seeds are carried by birds.

Dead trees in a harmless place are a lesson in ecology for those who watch. However, periodically inspecting all your trees, living and dead, for invasive insects and egg masses is a good idea. If the invasion of spotted lantern flies into New York is to be avoided, public vigilance is needed. Likewise, Oak Wilt and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid problems join concerns about Asian Longhorn beetles and Emerald Ash Borers. Any of these should be reported to DEC or other responsible agencies.

For further reading on the benefits of standing dead trees, or 'snags,' [click here](#).



CABIN FEVER RELIEVER

Come join us at Outhouse Park Lodge every Thursday morning from 9:30 am – 11:30 am for cards, coffee and snacks. The Town and City are working together to offer seniors in the Canandaigua area with a spot to gather and socialize. No registration is required and there are no residency restrictions. See flyer at the end of the newsletter for more details.