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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: MARCH 1, 1989

Once-rare bird a common sight

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE
In the quiet of the older woods, you'll often hear the silence broken by a loud "cuk, cuk, cuk" call coming from a nearby ridge or stand of large pine.

To the unfamiliar ear it may sound somewhat like the call of a hardy flicker that, for reasons we can only guess, has decided to spend the cold weather months there.

But as you listen to those clear repetitive notes echoing across the leafless forest, you begin to realize the sounds are different than those made by the more familiar flicker.

For one thing, like the many moods suggested by your remote surroundings, the pace is slower, the notes lower pitched, yet with greater volume.

Often this initial outburst is followed by some heavy pounding implying a cottager just over the next rise has decided to make some off-season alterations.

The mystery deepens however, when you gain the top of the ridge, for in the vast area of woodlands that unfolds, there is no sign of human habitation. Just as surprising there's often no sign of the call-maker either.

This is not unusual, for in many instances, the sounds of its voice

with its hammering accompaniment, or the results of its wood-working activities are all, one day, ever seen of the spectacular Pileated woodpecker.

Yet this crow-sized woodpecker with the flaming red crest has recovered from the status of a rare bird and is now as common in the older wooded sections of this province as it was when the European settlers arrived.

And while the clearing of its forest habitat played a large part in the bird's disappearance, such a large brightly colored attraction was all too often collected by early naturalists or market hunters.

When you come upon the workings of the Pileated woodpecker you can be sure you are in a mature forest or at least amongst trees that are the remnant of one. The very size of this big barker suggests the need for large trees to peck out an existence.

Its visits to rotting logs and decaying stumps leaves a scattering of wood chips lying about as it tears into the punky wood for the grubs and ants contained therein. More often than not, these excavations take on a rectangular shape rather than the usual round hole routings of the other woodpeckers.

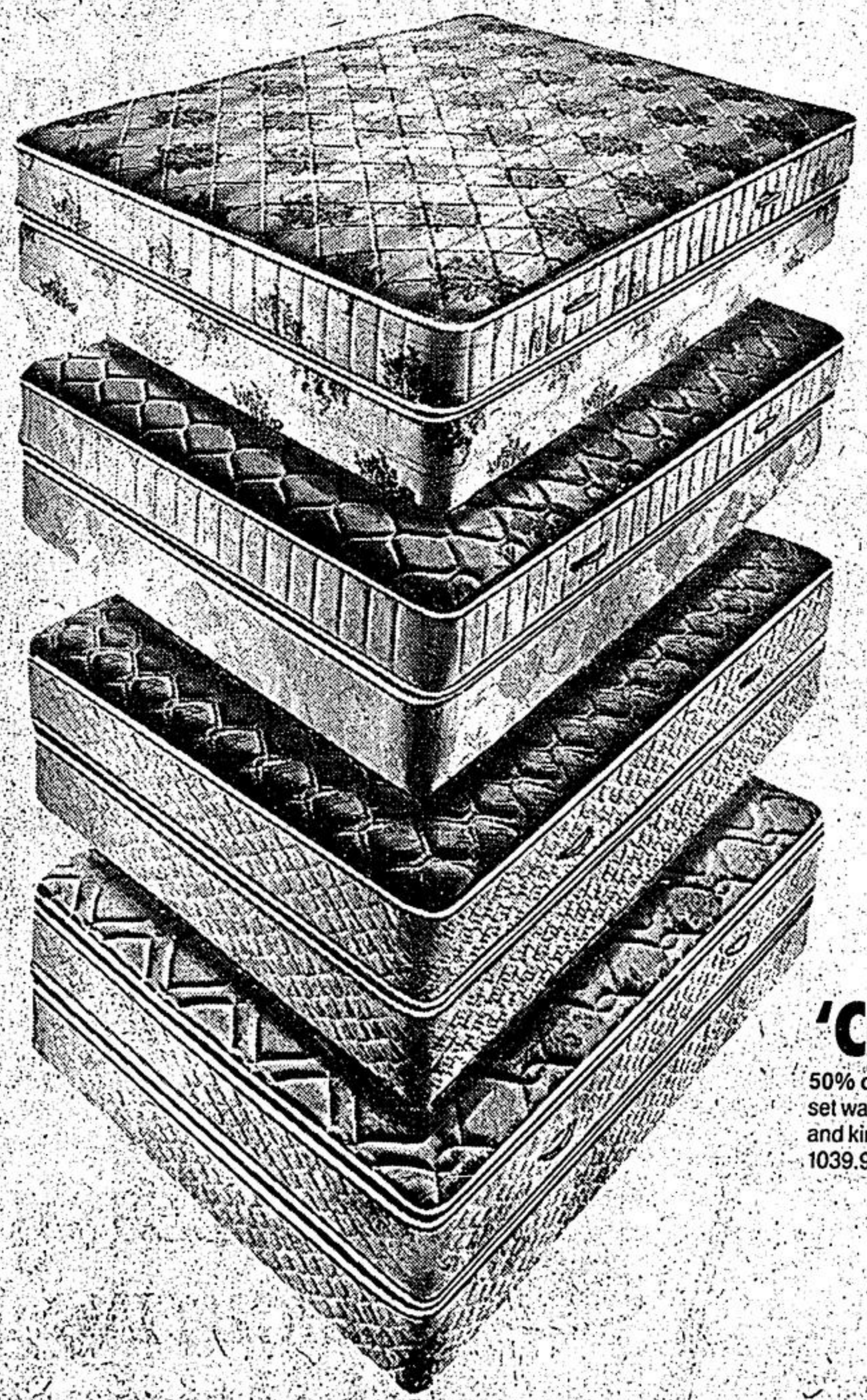
The extent of these pockets also serves notice they are the achievements of a large-sized creature. The cavities themselves frequently measure four inches across and may follow the contours of the tree in a chiselled vale for a length of a foot or more.

While these visible holes are feeding places, the actual nest-cavity is hollowed out in a separate tree with its inside dimensions being large enough for a nesting wood duck.

And though we have some resident Pileated woodpeckers on our farm here, I've never been able to duplicate the encounter I had with one on a Temagami fishing trip several years ago.

That particular "Cock-of-the-North," as they were often called, met me at eyeball level on a stump only an arm's length away as I crawled out of my small tent on all fours.

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Time the key issue at meeting

A most entertaining speaker, in the person of Jake Smith, was discovered by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Historical Society Wednesday evening.

Most long-time residents of Stouffville are familiar with Jake as a clockmaker and jeweler, but now a new career as public speaker awaits him. As well as being entertaining, he was most informative on the subject of antique clocks.

On display was the skeleton of the first clock he ever made, as well as his latest creation. He spent most of this past winter cutting gears and wheels from brass with the gear cutter made by his teacher, Gerry Smith, more than 60 years ago.

He told the assembled group of 28 he'd maintained the clock in the tower for over 37 years. This is a clock to be proud of, he said. It was made by British Company Gillett-Johnston, by Royal Warrant Clockmakers and founders to His Majesty King George V.

It was donated by Elizabeth Percy in memory of her father Rev. William Percy, pastor of Ringwood, Bloomington, Altona and Churchhill Christian Churches for 30 years. The clock in its tower was dedicated in the early 1930s.

The roof leaked once and the repairmen were called in. After working for a while, the head of the repair crew went to town clerk George Storry and asked if they should remove the large bell up there that didn't seem to be doing anything.

The clerk was wise enough to check with Jake, who after a moment's thought, told him if they wanted the clock to strike, they had better leave the bell in there.

Other business discussed at the meeting included a presentation from David Barthau on the loss of the name 'Main Street' and the implications this may have on the future.

The idea of having a memorial plaque created to replace the one long gone from Sangster's Grove was also brought forward. The missing sign appears to have been between two trees on the west side of the pavilion in the park. The Historical Society would like to help keep the name Sangster's known in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The next meeting will be May 24 at 8 p.m. The speaker is Jim Thomas, editor of The Stouffville Tribune.