



How to Help Northern Flickers

Northern Flickers are year-round residents in most of the United States. They inhabit open woodlands and savannas and have readily adapted to human-altered habitats. In fact, they commonly breed in urban parks as well as suburban and rural environments, nesting in tree cavities and foraging for insects on the ground. Two important ways you can help flickers are by providing nest boxes and protecting their foraging habitat.

What Northern Flickers Need

Food: Flickers have unusual feeding habits, especially for a woodpecker. The key component of flickers' diet is ants, which it gathers on the ground. Flickers also eat other insects found on the ground—particularly beetle larvae. During late autumn, winter, and early spring when ants and other insects may be difficult to locate, flickers consume a variety of berries and, to a lesser extent, seeds.

Nesting: Northern Flickers normally excavate their own nest cavities in dead or diseased tree trunks or large branches, in open forests or near open foraging areas.

Shelter: During the breeding season, Northern Flickers shelter in the same cavities they use for nesting. Outside of the breeding season, they roost on the vertical surface of tree trunks or branches, and occasionally in sheltered niches of buildings.

Other: European Starlings often take over potential flicker nest sites. Flickers may occasionally drum on house siding or attempt to excavate a nest site under the eaves of a house.

How You Can Help

- Where native ant colonies do not pose a concern to livestock or agriculture, colonies should be left undisturbed.
- Do not use lawn pesticides that may kill insects eaten by flickers and harm the birds.
- Plant native fruiting shrubs as secondary food sources. East of the Rockies, flickers prefer bayberry, sour gum, wild black cherry, hackberry, frost grape, flowering dogwood, blackberry, raspberry, and sumac. Western birds prefer gooseberry, sumac, Virginia creeper, dogwood, and elderberry.
- Flickers may also visit wire or log suet feeders
- Paint tree trunks with sugar water or other sweet fluid (molasses, syrup, etc.) to attract ants for Flickers
- If safety permits, retain large dying trees & snags as potential nest sites.
- Mount a nest box 6 to 30 feet up in a large tree. Box should measure at least 7 x 7 inches wide and 16 to 18 inches deep, with a 2 ½ inch diameter nesting hole. Fill box with sawdust. Orient the box opening to the north in warmer southern climates, or to the south in cooler latitudes.
- Plant large shade trees that can provide sheltered roosting sites for sleeping birds.
- Since starlings are non-protected exotic species, you can legally discourage them by removing their nests.
- Suggestions on how to discourage flickers and other woodpeckers from drumming or otherwise pecking on homes can be found at www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/natres/06516.html.