

## Northern Flickers in the City

*Colaptes auratus*

### Identification:

Flickers are large, brown woodpeckers with gray heads, black bars on the back and wings and handsome black-scalloped plumage. Look for a black “necklace” on breasts, and the males have a red “moustache”. In flight you’ll see a flash of red and a bright white patch on their rumps.

### Natural history:

Flickers are native and can be found throughout the United States. They are year long residents of Colorado. There are two distinct subspecies, the red shafted and yellow shafted. Only the red shafted are in Colorado. They prefer open spaces near trees, and can be found up into the mountains and in most suburban and urban areas.



### Diet:

Although they eat some fruits, berries, seeds and nuts, their primary food is insects. Ants alone can make up 45% of their diet. They have a behavior called anting, during which they use the acid from the ants to assist in preening, which helps keep them free of parasites. They often forage on the ground, searching for ants and beetles, while other woodpeckers spend most of their time in trees.

### Breeding & Nesting:

Northern Flickers typically excavate nesting cavities in dead or diseased pine, cottonwood, willow trees, or posts or birdhouses if their size will work for them. They generally prefer to build their own nests. Males do most of the excavation with some help from females. Both incubate the 5 to 8 eggs for about 11 days. Both sexes feed the young, which leave the nest after 24 to 27 days. The parents continue to feed the young once they fledge, and soon the young begin to follow the adults to foraging sites and gather their own food. Invasive European starlings will occasionally steal their nesting sites and drive the flickers away.

### Benefits:

Multiple species of birds and mammals also use the excavated nest sites. Additionally they help keep insect populations in balance. They are large and beautiful birds, easily spotted throughout the city. Their beauty and high levels of activity make them a great subject for bird watching in neighborhoods, parks and yards.

### Conflicts:

Birds can excavate nest holes in the outer walls of homes, damaging siding. Once birds have established nesting sites, they can be extremely persistent and create multiple holes in houses. During the early spring, woodpeckers hammer to attract mates, to establish and/or defend a territory, to excavate nesting or roosting sites, and to search for insects. The birds often hammer on wooden shingles, cedar or redwood siding, metal or plastic gutters, television antennas and light posts because these materials produce loud, hollow sounds. Drumming is most common during early morning and late afternoon, and usually ends by July 1.

### Discouraging flickers from damaging siding:

Act quickly when drumming or pecking begins at your home. The longer they use the site, the harder it is to discourage them from continuing. It is illegal to close a hole once young are in it.

1. Install moving visual repellants. EX. Hang dark colored hawk mobiles, streamers of reflective Mylar scare tape, hang Mylar balloons, bright colored streamers, pie tins, strips of aluminum foil. Allow them to move freely.
  - a. Tack or nail one end of tape or streamers to the outer end of the roof soffit, just under the gutter, and attach the other end to the side of the house. Before attaching the bottom, twist the tape 6 to 7 times and keep the tape loose enough to provide some slack. The slack and twisting are necessary to produce the shimmering effect. Apply these tape strands at parallel intervals of 2 to 3 feet.
2. Non moving visual repellants can be less effective, but two that have had some success are mirrors that enlarge images (round shaving mirrors) or large rubber spiders attached to siding.
3. Hang light weight plastic bird netting over siding, keep it loose or at least 3 inches away from siding so bird can't peck through it. Make sure they cannot get behind it.



### Damage already occurred:

Make sure there are no young in the cavity. It is illegal and inhumane to harass adult birds away from a nest with young. Young should be gone from the nest between mid June and mid July. If no young, act IMMEDIATELY to exclude woodpeckers.

1. Cover hole with metal sheathing or hardware cloth. It must be sturdy so birds can't break through it. Chicken wire is too light.
2. Give flicker other options! Installing a flicker nest box on side of house has been very successful.
3. Use above techniques to frighten away or discourage more flicker damage. Open holes attract other flickers, so repairing damage as soon as possible will help.

Links to building a flicker nest box:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/construction/flicker.htm>

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/wildlife/ndblinds/nortflic.htm>

<http://www.50birds.com/MPb071614212.htm>



Northern flickers are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act

### Removal of Flickers:

**Federal and state permits are required to lethally control flickers. Contact Colorado Division of Wildlife for more information.**

### Resources

Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern\\_flicker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_flicker)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pigeonwatch>

Bird Web, Washington Audubon Society: [http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird\\_details.aspx?id=279](http://www.birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=279)

Colorado Division of Wildlife: <http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/Birds/Woodpeckers.htm>

CSU extension: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/natres/06516.html>

