

northern flicker *Colaptes auratus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Piciformes

Family: Picidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The northern flicker averages about 12 to 14 inches in length. It has a large, white-feathered, rump patch that can be seen when this bird flies. Its back feathers are brown with dark bars. There is a black-feathered patch on the upper chest, and a red-feathered patch on the back of the head. The male has a black mark below each eye.

BEHAVIORS

The northern flicker is a common migrant, summer resident and winter resident statewide in Illinois. Those flickers that migrate from Illinois in the fall overwinter in the southern United States. Migration occurs during the day and at night. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in March. Nesting occurs from April through May. The nest may be placed in trees scattered in grasslands, forest edges or residential areas. A cavity is excavated by the male and female over a one- to two-week period in a live tree, dead tree, snag, fence post or on the side of a building. This bird will use a nest box if one is available. The nest is built from two to 60 feet above the ground. Five to 12 white eggs are laid by the female. Eggs are incubated by the male and female during the day, and only by the male at night, over an 11- to 12-day period. Fall migration begins in July. The northern flicker lives in cornfields, shrubs, open forests, orchards, pastures and towns. Its song is a repeated “wick wick wick” while the call notes are “klee-yer” and “flick-a.” This bird spends much time on the ground, searching for ants. It will also eat beetles, blackberries, poison ivy berries and wild black cherries.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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