

# Understanding Northern Flickers

Northern flickers are a type of woodpecker common in the Fort Collins area. They are large and noticeable and, at certain times of year, quite noisy. Learning about them will help residents and homeowners co-exist with these beneficial native birds.

## Spring Serenade

Every spring, the rapid-fire, high-pitched *kwik-kwik-kwik* of northern flickers announce their quest for mates, territories, and nesting places. They may insist on drumming on hollow trees, telephone poles, or your metal gutters and chimney flashing. The louder, the better!

## Your House

Flickers explore many trees and wooden structures to find a place to nest. Hollow-sounding buildings fool flickers into thinking they are good places to excavate a nesting cavity. When the bird drills into a building, it soon discovers there is no “bottom” and therefore not suitable for the precious eggs. The bird moves over a few feet, finds another wonderful-sounding hollow place, and excavates another hole. Flickers can cause considerable damage to buildings.

There are a variety of methods of discouraging flickers including providing suitable nesting sites for them. Visit [www.ext.colostate.edu](http://www.ext.colostate.edu). *Preventing Woodpecker Damage* for tips on deterring flickers. Remember, flickers are protected by strict federal and state laws. *Only non-lethal tactics may be used to exclude flickers unless a federal permit is obtained.*

## Family Life



Flickers mate for life. Initially, the male does most of the cavity excavation but the female soon joins in. The female lays five to eight eggs, one egg per day. The parents never leave the nest untended after the eggs are laid. If the flickers have successfully laid eggs, starlings and squirrels probably can't take over the nest.

Both sexes incubate the eggs and feed the young. As they grow, the female's attentiveness diminishes and the male's increases. The nestlings make a buzzing sound when something approaches the nest. Researchers think this sound resembles a swarm of bees and may be a predator deterrent.

After a month, the parents coax the young out of the nest by withholding food and calling to them. The young birds depend on the parents for food and protection for several more weeks. Look for them feeding together in family groups.

## Flickers Love Ants!

Flickers are beneficial to humans because they love to eat ants. They eat more ants than any other bird in North America. Look for them on the ground pecking in anthills. They also eat worms, acorns, nuts, grains, and insect larvae in the bark of trees