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## Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*

This bird is common in Florida's urban habitats, where it sometimes irritates homeowners by drumming on the eaves of houses and other buildings, especially on metal surfaces. Its flashy white rump patch and vibrant call make identification relatively easy. The Northern Flicker's breeding range extends from the tree line in Alaska and Canada through the entire United States to Middle America (AOU 1983).

**Habitat.** Northern Flickers reside in open pine and mixed woodlands, hammocks, and residential areas in Florida.

The Northern Flicker's diet is comprised of mainly animal foods in the spring and summer (75 to 90%) and mainly vegetable foods in the fall and winter (50 to 60%) (Martin et al. 1951). Approximately one-half of their food consists of ants and beetles. In one study, ants were found in 524 of 684 stomachs examined, and 98 stomachs contained no other food (Howell 1932). One bird had consumed almost 5,000 ants during one meal. The nest of the Northern Flicker is usually located in a dead snag, between 1 to 18 m (2 and 60 ft) above the ground. Occasionally this woodpecker will nest in a bank, sawdust pile, haystack, or even on the ground (Bent 1939). It readily accepts nest boxes. The excavation of the cavity takes about 12 days. Usually from 5 to 8 white eggs are laid. Incubation takes from 11 to 12 days, and the young fledge in 25 to 28 days.



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**Seasonal Occurrence.** Northern Flickers are among the state's resident species. Many nonresident Northern Flickers also migrate into Florida in the fall, where they are often quite noticeable along the Gulf coast in October. Spring migration occurs February through April (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Eggs are laid between late March and June.

**Status.** Of the 7 woodpecker species that breed in Florida, the Northern Flicker was the fourth most common during the Atlas survey. The Pileated Woodpecker was reported in more quads (888 versus 797); however, the Northern Flicker was confirmed in more (400 versus 324). Like other woodpeckers, the Northern Flicker is a cavity nester. This explains its absence from the agricultural areas southeast of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. The solid band of confirmed breeding records across northern Dade County corresponds to the Tamiami Trail (US 41), where nonnative trees lining the highway provide nest sites.

The reason for the absence of the species in extensive areas of the Big Bend, including western Madison County, much of southern Jefferson County, as well as major portions of Taylor, Lafayette, Dixie, and Levy counties is not so obvious. The answer probably lies in the preference of the Northern Flicker to feed on the ground in the open. Ants are a preferred food, and the Northern Flicker is often seen preying on ant hills in lawns, pastures, parks, other open areas. The species tends to be scarce and local in areas with extensive unbroken groundcover such as pine plantations and unburned woodlands. This is probably the reason for the dearth of Northern Flickers in these areas and in major portions of Nassau, Baker, Columbia, and Hamilton counties.

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# Northern Flicker

