

Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus

Class: Aves

Order: Piciformes

Review Status: Reviewed (general)

Version Date: 11 June 2022

Note: This assessment includes both subspecies found in Alaska: *C. a. luteus* and *C. a. cafer* (Wiebe and Moore 2017). *C. a. cafer* is restricted to Southeast Alaska.

Conservation Status

Table 1 Conservation status according to state, national, and international organizations and agencies.

Organization	Rank
NatureServe	G5/S5B
ADF&G	Species of Greatest Conservation Need
IUCN	Least Concern

Final Rank

Conservation Category: **VII. Yellow**

Low status and either high biological vulnerability or high action need

Table 2 ASRS categorical scores. Higher numerical scores denote greater concern.

Category	Range	Score
Status	-20 to 20	-6
Biological	-50 to 50	-24
Action	-40 to 40	16

Status

Variables measure the trend in a taxon's population status or distribution. Higher status scores denote taxa with known declining trends. Status scores range from -20 (increasing) to 20 (decreasing).

Population Trend in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Suspected stable. Long-term trends (1993-2015) using Breeding Bird Survey data point to non-significant declines in the Northwestern Interior Forest Bird Conservation Region (BCR; roughly equivalent to central Alaska) and increasing trends in the Northern Pacific Rainforest BCR (Southeast and southcoastal Alaska; Handel and Sauer 2017). These trends are somewhat in contrast with long-term trends elsewhere in its North American range, where the Northern Flicker has experienced widespread declines, especially in the eastern and central U.S., and no increases (Wiebe and Moore 2017).

Score: -6

Distribution Trend in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Unknown.

Score: 0

Status Total: -6

Biological

Variables measure aspects of a taxon's distribution, abundance and life history. Higher biological scores suggest greater vulnerability to extirpation. Biological scores range from -50 (least vulnerable) to 50 (most vulnerable).

Population Size in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Uncertain, but >25,000 based on estimates from PIF (2019).

Score: -10

Range Size in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Breeds throughout forested habitats in central Alaska. Breeds and resides year-round on the mainland of and several islands in Southeast Alaska (Heinl and Piston 2009; Wiebe and Moore 2017). Wintering range is most restricted and has an estimated size between 10,000 and 100,000 sq. km, based on map from ACCS (2017a).

Score: -2

Population Concentration in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Does not concentrate.

Score: -10

Reproductive Potential in Alaska

Age of First Reproduction (-5 to 5)

Females breed within their first year of life (Wiebe and Moore 2017).

Score: -5

Number of Young (-5 to 5)

Clutch size ranges from 3 to 12 eggs, with a mean of 6.5 eggs \pm 1.4 SD (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959; Wiebe and Moore 2017).

Score: 1

Ecological Specialization in Alaska

Dietary (-5 to 5)

During breeding, forages for insects on the ground. Main prey items include ants and ground beetles; other insects and crustaceans are consumed to a smaller extent. During the non-breeding season, diet shifts to fruits and seeds (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959; Wiebe and Moore 2017). The Northern Flicker is a common visitor at winter feeders (Heinl and Piston 2009).

Score: 1

Habitat (-5 to 5)

Found in open coniferous and mixedwood forests and in forest edges adjacent to wetlands, residential and agricultural areas, and clearcuts (Spindler and Kessel 1980; Cotter and Andres 2000a; Heint and Piston 2009; Wiebe and Moore 2017). Usually excavates nest cavities in dead or diseased trees from a variety of tree species, but will occasionally use or reuse existing nest cavities (Wiebe and Moore 2017). *Populus* species, including quaking aspen and balsam poplar, may be preferred nesting trees in mixedwood boreal forests (Spindler and Kessel 1980; Wiebe and Moore 2017).

Score: 1

Biological Total: -24

Action

Variables measure current state of knowledge or extent of conservation efforts directed toward a given taxon. Higher action scores denote greater information needs due to lack of knowledge or conservation action. Action scores range from -40 (lower needs) to 40 (greater needs).

Management Plans and Regulations in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA 1918).

Score: 2

Knowledge of Distribution and Habitat in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Distribution and habitat associations are generally known from multi-species bird surveys (e.g., Hannah et al. 2003; Van Hemert et al. 2006; Johnson et al. 2008b; Phillips et al. 2017; see citations in Habitat Specialization). Additional research is needed in Alaska to determine specific nesting requirements, winter habitat associations, and migratory routes.

Score: 2

Knowledge of Population Trends in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Data from the Breeding Bird Survey can be used to estimate long-term trends, however, like other woodpecker species the Northern Flicker is infrequently detected on BBS routes (Cotter and Andres 2000a; Handel and Sauer 2017). Roadside surveys such as the BBS do not cover the extent of this species' range in Alaska and are not the most appropriate monitoring method given this species' habitat requirements (Cotter and Andres 2000a).

Score: 2

Knowledge of Factors Limiting Populations in Alaska (-10 to 10)

Little is known about the ecology of this species in Alaska and the factors that limit its population and distribution. Elsewhere in its North American range, three hypotheses have been proposed to explain its long-term declines (Wiebe and Moore 2017). First, the availability of suitable substrates for nest cavities may be limited, especially in managed forests or suburban areas where snags and diseased trees are often removed. Second, European Starlings (*Sturna vulgaris*) may compete with and successfully usurp Northern Flickers from their nests. Even if Northern Flickers do re-nest, they tend to have smaller clutches that are laid later in the season. Finally, the application of pesticides on golf courses, suburban lawns, and agricultural fields may have adverse effects on woodpecker populations (Wiebe and Moore 2017). Additional research

is needed to test these hypotheses and to identify limiting factors in natural habitats such as those found throughout most of its Alaskan range.

Score: 10

Action Total: 16

Supplemental Information

Variables do not receive numerical scores. Instead, they are used to sort taxa to answer specific biological or management questions.

Harvest: None or Prohibited

Seasonal Occurrence: Year-round

Taxonomic Significance: Monotypic species

% Global Range in Alaska: <10%

% Global Population in Alaska: <25%

Peripheral: No

References

- Alaska Center for Conservation Science (ACCS). 2017a. Wildlife Data Portal. University of Alaska Anchorage. Available online: <http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/apps/wildlife>
- Cotter, P. A., and B. A. Andres. 2000a. Breeding bird habitat associations on the Alaska breeding bird survey. Information and Technology Report USGS/BRD/ITR- 2000-0010, Biological Resource Division, U.S. Geological Survey, Springfield, VA, USA.
- Gabrielson, I. N., and F. C. Lincoln. 1959. The Birds of Alaska. The Stackpole Company, Harrisburg, PA, USA.
- Handel, C. M. and Sauer, J. R. 2017. Combined analysis of roadside and off-road breeding bird survey data to assess population change in Alaska. *The Condor* 119(3):557-575. DOI: 10.1650/CONDOR-17-67.1
- Hannah, K. C., A. R. Ajmi, and T. R. Walker. 2003. Distribution and abundance of landbirds in the Tanana Valley State Forest, Alaska 2002-2003. Alaska Bird Observatory, Fairbanks, AK, USA.
- Heinl, S. C., and A. W. Piston. 2009. Birds of the Ketchikan area, Southeast Alaska. *Western Birds* 40(2):54–144.
- Johnson, J. A., B. A. Andres, and J. A. Bissonette. 2008b. Birds of the major mainland rivers of Southeast Alaska. General Technical Report PNW-GTR-739. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, OR, USA.
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). 1918. U.S. Code Title 16 §§ 703-712 Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Phillips, L. M., C. L. McIntyre, J. D. Mizel, E. J. Williams, and G. M. Colligan. 2017. Monitoring passerine birds in the Central Alaska Network. Report NPS/CAKN/NRRS—2017/1478, National Park Service, Fort Collins, CO, USA.

Partners in Flight (PIF). 2019. Population Estimates Database, version 3.0. Available online:
<http://pif.birdconservancy.org/PopEstimates>. Accessed 09-April-2019.

Alaska Center for Conservation Science
Alaska Natural Heritage Program
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, AK