



# California Wildlife Center

## November 3, 2023

### Northern Flicker

Northern Flickers are migratory woodpeckers ranging from Alaska down into Central America. Northern Flickers found in the west are mostly brown with black markings and the males have a red patch on their face starting at the base of their beak. You will also see orange coloring on the underside of their wings and tail feathers. California Wildlife Center has admitted four Northern Flickers so far this year, which is about average for this time of the year. In mid-October one was admitted mildly dehydrated, thin, missing some flight feathers, and with open wounds on his right wing.



**Northern Flicker profile showing large pointy beak to help catch insects.**



**Underside of the wing showing orange coloring.**

After giving the patient fluids and starting him on anti-inflammatories, pain medication, and antibiotics, our hospital staff cleaned and dressed the wounds. Upon further examination, it was found that there was an infection in one of the bird's feather shafts and inflammation in his left retina. While this type of inflammation can sometimes be linked to head trauma, in this case we do not know the cause. This patient was transferred from a local shelter, so our hospital staff wasn't able to get background information from the rescuer.

For the past fifteen days, our hospital staff have been regularly cleaning and redressing his wounds as well as checking the status of the infection and retina inflammation. While this Northern Flicker still has a guarded prognosis, he is eating well, is active in his enclosure and there have been regular improvements.

While it is most common to see woodpeckers pecking or hammering on trees to find and store food in the holes they make, the Northern Flicker is most often found on the ground using their long-curved beak and sticky, hard-tipped tongue to dig and catch their main food source: ants and beetles. The majority of these birds make their homes in dead or sick trees in forests, wooded areas, or fields with trees, but they can also be found in more residential areas. When these woodpeckers perch, they use their pointed tail feathers to help them grip the tree. This is why we encourage landowners to leave some dead trees standing—they provide needed homes for our wild neighbors.

If you find an injured Northern Flicker, gently place them in a pillowcase lined box with air holes in a quiet, dark, warm room and contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for assistance.