

Wildlife Symbols of Alabama

State Bird

Common Flicker *Colaptes auratus* (Linnaeus)

Other names used locally: *Yellowhammer*, *Flicker*, *Yellow-shafted Flicker*, *Southern Flicker*

Year Adopted: 1927

History: The common flicker is the official name of the state bird of Alabama, but it's more commonly known as the yellowhammer. Alabama has been known as the "Yellowhammer State" since the Civil War. The yellowhammer nickname was applied to the Confederate soldiers from Alabama when a company of young cavalry soldiers from Huntsville arrived at Hopkinsville, KY. The officers and men of the Huntsville company wore fine, new uniforms, whereas the soldiers who had long been on the battlefields were dressed in faded, worn uniforms. On the sleeves, collars and coattails of the new Cavalry troop were bits of brilliant yellow cloth. As the company rode

past Company A, Will Arnett cried out in greeting "Yellowhammer, Yellowhammer, flicker, flicker!" The greeting brought a roar of laughter from the men and from that moment the Huntsville soldiers were spoken of as the "yellowhammer company." The term quickly spread throughout the Confederate Army and all Alabama troops were referred to unofficially as the "Yellowhammers."

Description: The back of the male of the common flicker is a gray-brown color with broken black bars on the body feathers and with the yellow shafts of the flight feathers partly visible. The rump patch is white and the two-pointed tail is mainly black. The crown and back of the neck is gray with a red band at the nape. The cheeks are pinkish-buff with a black "moustache" and bib below the chin on the throat. The underparts are creamy with many, irregular black spots. The undersides of the wings and tail are bright yellow. The female differs from the male in that she does not have the "moustache." Both sexes have gray legs, a dark gray bill and dark brown eyes. The talons are quite sharp. This helps the bird to easily perch on vertical tree trunks.

Distribution: Common throughout Alabama.

Food: Flickers reportedly eat more ants than any other American bird. In addition, they consume most other types of insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, and caterpillars. The flicker will also eat many types of vegetative materials including all types of berries, nuts, seeds and fruits. The berries of poison ivy appear to be a favorite.

Management: Feeding habits of the flicker make it reasonably easy to produce food items that are attractive. Production of berries, nuts and seeds will attract other types of birds also. Since this bird will use a nest box for nesting, it lends itself to this phase of management by providing such sites. A box for a flicker should have a 7 x 7 inch floor, be 16 to 18 inches deep and have a 2 1/2 inch diameter entrance located 2 inches from the top. It should be located 6 to 20 feet above ground. The bottom should be covered with wood chips to a depth of 2 inches.

Sources: *Acts of Alabama*, September 6, 1927; *Alabama State Emblems*, Alabama Department of Archives and History, nd.; Davis, James R. *Non-Game Birds in Alabama*, Wildlife Section, Game and Fish Division, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, n.d.



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State Freshwater Fish

Largemouth Bass *Micropterus salmoides*

Year Adopted: 1975

History: The largemouth bass is the state freshwater fish of Alabama. According to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Division of Wildlife and

Freshwater Fisheries, the record largemouth bass caught in Alabama was 16 pounds, 8 ounces. The fish was caught in Shelby County in 1987.

Description: Size ranges from 13 to 20 inches with a forked tail. This large-mouthed fish has a dark green or brown back with olive to yellowish-green sides turning to a cream or white color on the belly. A dark stripe present on each side may fade

with age. The first dorsal fin is spiny, the second one rounded.

Distribution: It is found throughout the state in streams, ponds and lakes, often with vegetation.

Food: Young bass eat insects and other invertebrates (worms, crayfish, and zooplankton). Adult bass eat other small fish such as bluegill and a variety of minnows, tadpoles, and crayfish.

Management: When resting or feeding, largemouths can often be found near some type of cover or structure. Artificial reefs may be constructed in ponds larger than 10 acres to provide additional cover. Consult your local Extension service or the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for additional management techniques.

Source: *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North*



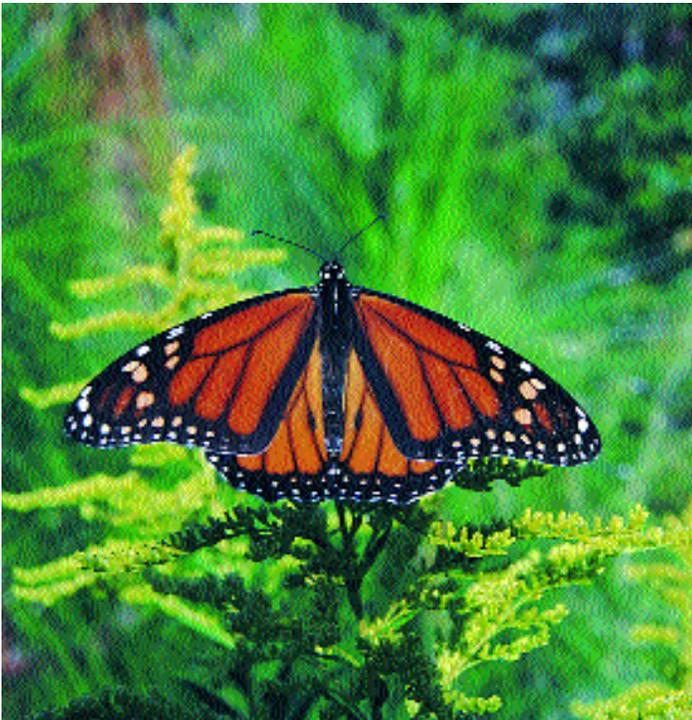
Duane Raver/USFWS

American Fishes, Whales, and Dolphins by Herbert T. Boschung and Daniel W. Gotshall, editor, 1983; www.fieldand-stream.com; "Principles of Wildlife Management in Alabama," by Jim Armstrong, Marisa Lee Sasser and Michael P. Masser, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, 1998.

State Insect

Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus*
Year Adopted: 1989

History: The monarch butterfly is the state insect of Alabama. This Monarch is the only butterfly that annually migrates as



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birds do. However, no single butterfly will make the entire journey. Eastern and Midwestern monarchs migrate to Mexico, and Western monarchs fly to the coast of California. These butterflies spend the winter clustered in trees. These areas have become tourist attractions because of the unique sight of so many butterflies in one place. In spring the butterflies head back north, breeding along the way. Their offspring will be the ones to return to the starting point. (Note: the Eastern tiger swallowtail is the state butterfly and official mascot of Alabama.)

Description: The monarch, about 3 1/2 inches with wings extended, is bright orange with black veins and has black margins with white dots. The tips of the front wings are mostly black with orange and white spots. Males have a black spot on the vein of the mid-hindwing.

Distribution: Common throughout Alabama.

Food: Milkweed is the host plant for Monarch butterflies. As a result of eating this plant, the caterpillar and adult are poisonous to predators.

Management: Butterflies need both host plants and nectar sources. Leaving unmowed areas where milkweed is present will attract adult butterflies who will then lay eggs on the plants. Natural and planted wildflowers will provide a source of nectar.

Source: *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies* by Robert Michael Pyle, 1981.