

Discover Aurora's True Nature...

Nature Notes Companion: Cottonwood Trees

If you are looking for life in Aurora, look no further than your local cottonwood tree.

Cottonwood Tree Facts

Name: Plains cottonwood, *Populus deltoides*

Identification: Mature cottonwood trees have grey, deeply-furrowed bark, large, heart-shaped leaves, and pendant (hanging) catkins (fruits and pollen-producing organs)

Habitat: Cottonwoods need lots of water. You can find native cottonwoods along creeks, canals, and the edge of wetlands or reservoirs

Namesake: Cottonwoods are named after the "cotton" female trees produce, which is designed to help spread tiny seeds across the landscape.



This northern flicker is excavating a nesting cavity in a cottonwood tree.

Aurora cottonwood trees provide essential food and shelter for wildlife.

Sit quietly in the company of a cottonwood tree and you will discover it is a hub of activity. Buzzing insects collect sap, chew on leaves, or find refuge in peeling, furrowed bark. Songbirds glean insects and spiders from cottonwood leaves, while woodpeckers and nuthatches probe for spiders and larvae in cottonwood bark. Trunk cavities provide essential nesting sites and cover for raccoons, squirrels, birds, and insects. Standing dead cottonwood trees, called snags, also provide cover and food for many



It is easier to spot cottonwood homes and nests before the trees leaf out in early May. Great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, and Swainson's hawks frequently nest in mature cottonwood trees.