

Feather Emoji Proposal

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Credit: *Aphelandra Messer*

Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the FEATHER to the Unicode emoji library. Feathers are the distinctive epidermal growths of birds and are a characteristic which distinguishes them from other groups of animals. Forming a bird's plumage, feathers provide a wide variety of functions including insulation, waterproofing, camouflage, communication, and flight. As birds are found on all seven continents, their feathers hold broad significance to cultures around the world—yet there is currently no FEATHER emoji or available substitute. Adding FEATHER would provide the opportunity for use of the emoji in a wide array of idioms, symbols, and meanings.

Introduction

One of the key characteristics that separate birds from other groups of vertebrates are their feathers, which aid in thermoregulation, are used in display, and are essential to a bird's flight. While birds have several different kinds of feathers on their bodies, the pattern, color, and arrangement of their plumage is the most identifying aspect of each species' appearance.¹

Humans have used feathers for decorative, practical, and cultural purposes since pre-historic days, and even archaic humans such as Neanderthals collected feathers for various uses.² To this day, high-end pillows, blankets, and coats use the fine down feathers of birds, especially geese, for insulation and padding. Feathers used as quills were the primary writing instrument of the western world for more than thirteen centuries and the word *pen* derives from the Latin

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feather>

² <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/caveman-couture-neandertals-rocked-dark-feathers/>

penna or *pinna*, meaning both pen and feather.^{3, 4} Throughout history and in modern global society, feathers have been a vibrant addition to fashion, from feathered fans in ancient China, to the ornamentation of hats in the nineteenth century, to the recent design of artificial feathers for use in clothing.⁵

To the indigenous peoples of the Americas and particularly to the American Indians in the U.S. and First Nations peoples in Canada, feathers hold religious and spiritual significance, often symbolizing trust, honor, wisdom, power, and freedom. The feathers of eagles and hawks are prized and are considered some of the most prestigious cultural objects, given only as a sign of the highest respect to those who have earned the right to wear or possess them.⁶ Today, as a protective measure, the possession or sale of any migratory bird feather, including eagles, is prohibited by The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, upheld by the United States, Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Russia.⁷ Native Americans, who may wear bald and golden eagle feathers or make them into religious and cultural items for their own or tribal use, are the only exemption to this law.⁸

Beyond their many direct uses, feathers have a broad range of symbolic meanings. Associated with the flight of birds, feathers are often seen to have come from on high, representing divine wisdom, truth, and heaven. Feathers can further be interpreted as symbolic of levity, travel, fertility, cowardice, and innocence.⁹ With so many uses and connotations, and such a long history of use in cultures around the world, the FEATHER makes an excellent candidate for a high-use emoji.

Names

- CLDR short name: feather
- CLDR keywords: feather, birds, flight

Selection Factors Inclusion

A. Compatibility

Currently, no FEATHER emoji exists on the major messaging platforms.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quill#History>

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pen>

⁵ <https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/clothing-closures-embellishments/feathers-fashion>

⁶ <http://www.native-net.org/na/native-american-feathers.html>

⁷ <https://www.fws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations/laws-legislations/migratory-bird-treaty-act.php>

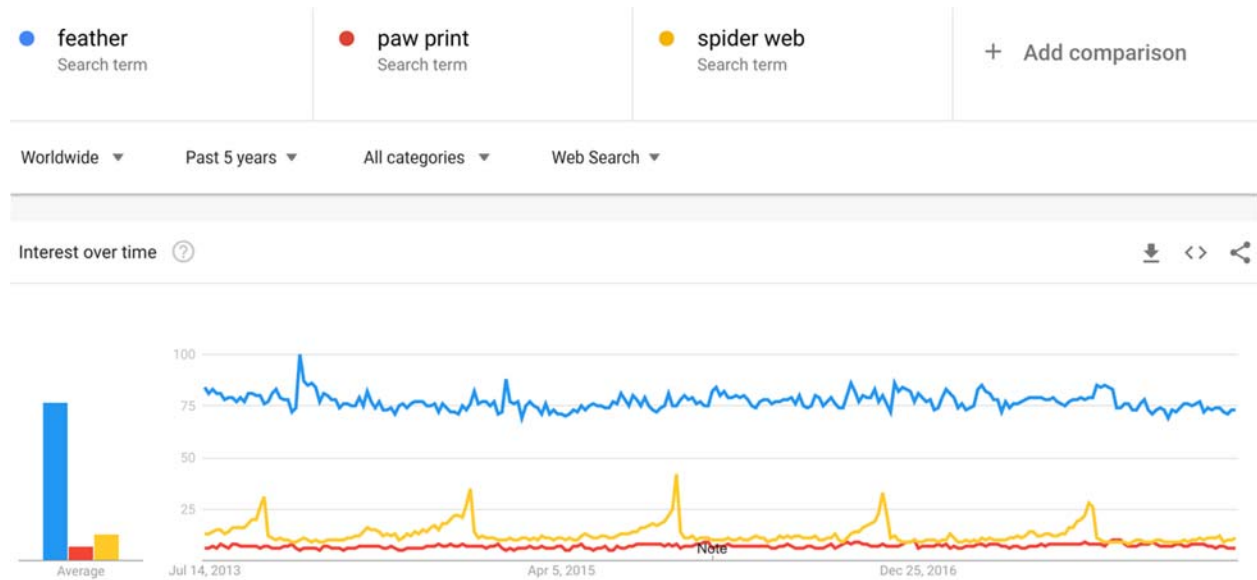
⁸ <https://www.fws.gov/eaglerepository/factsheets/PossessionOfEagleFeathersFactSheet.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.whats-your-sign.com/symbol-meaning-of-feathers.html>

B. Expected Usage Level

Frequency


The FEATHER emoji would have a high level of expected usage. Using Google Trends to compare “feather” to existing emoji in the animal category that similarly do not directly represent animals themselves, such as “paw print” and “spider web,” reveals that “feather” holds significantly greater interest.




Source: Google Trends, Accessed July 1, 2018

This is further supported by the popularity of “feather” on major social media sites like Instagram and on major search engines including Google, YouTube, and Bing.


Instagram | Search

 #feather
2,143,502 posts

Instagram | Search

 #pawprint
180,876 posts

Instagram | Search

 #spiderweb
838,393 posts

Google | feather | Search

All Images Shopping News Videos More Settings Tools

About 479,000,000 results (0.53 seconds)

Google | paw print | Search

All Images Shopping Books Videos More Settings Tools

About 84,600,000 results (0.45 seconds)

Google | spider web | Search

All Images Shopping Videos News More Settings Tools

About 284,000,000 results (0.49 seconds)



YouTube

feather



About 4,540,000 results



YouTube

paw print



About 126,000 results



YouTube

spider web



About 2,970,000 results



feather



All

Images

Videos

Maps

News



My saves

34,300,000 Results

Any time ▾



spider web



All

Images

Videos

Maps

News



My saves

1,120,000 Results

Any time ▾



paw print



All

Images

Videos

Maps

News



My saves

924,000 Results

Any time ▾

Multiple Usages

The FEATHER emoji is a strong candidate due to the wide array of uses it lends itself to as both an object, such as a “quill,” and in idiomatic expressions, such as:

- “birds of a feather flock together” — similar people stick together
- “light as a feather” — extremely lightweight
- “feather in your cap” — an accomplishment you take pride in
- “to ruffle your feathers” — to annoy or upset you
- “to tar and feather” — to publicly criticize, reprimand, or humiliate
- “you could have knocked me down with a feather” — to be thrown for a loop
- “in fine feather” — well dressed; in good humor
- “feather brain” — a stupid person
- “be spitting feathers” — to strongly express anger, typically verbally
- “fuss and feathers” — needless commotion and display
- “to feather your nest” — to enrich yourself through influence or position to lead a comfortable life

Use in Sequences

Below are just a few of the many possible combinations of emoji that include the FEATHER emoji:

- Lightweight: FEATHER and PERSON LIFTING WEIGHTS
- Down jacket/bedding: COAT/BED and FEATHER
- Writing (with a quill): FEATHER and SCROLL/PAPER/NOTEBOOK/BOOK
- Feather brain: FEATHER and BRAIN
- Tickle: FEATHER and FOOT/NOSE/EAR
- Lightheaded: WOOZY FACE and FEATHER

C. Image Distinctiveness

The FEATHER is distinct from the appearance of any bird and yet is instantly recognizable as a unique and meaningful image. Currently, other emoji exist to fill this gap.

D. Completeness

As a key physical characteristic of birds with its own separate significance, the FEATHER deserves its own place within the current set of bird emoji.

E. Frequently Requested

On Twitter, a repeated and consistent interest in a FEATHER emoji is readily apparent. The tweets below not only show demand, but also a number of ways requesters intend to use FEATHER.

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- The image shows a vertical list of seven tweets from Twitter. Each tweet includes a profile picture, the user's name and handle, the date, the text of the tweet, and engagement icons for replies, retweets, and likes. The tweets are as follows:
- T.L. Stillinger** @TeaStill · Mar 14
Replying to @BashfulBulba
Oh man, time to gather up logs for that house upgrade 🏠 (darn it, why is there no feather emoji?)
1 reply, 3 retweets, 2 likes
 - Shaz (Shazzy) Wrench** 🎸🎵🎶🎧🎶 @fiftyminus2 · Jan 29
Replying to @PeterEvans48
Cute Peter x 🐦 (why is there no feather emoji?!)
1 reply, 2 retweets, 2 likes
 - FEATHER** @FeatherOfficial · 28 Dec 2017
Again, asking why there's no feather emoji?
4 replies, 4 retweets, 31 likes
 - Raisa 🐾Bexana** @oncefamilyx · 4 Nov 2017
when are we finally gonna get a feather emoji?
1 reply, 10 retweets, 13 likes
 - sarah** 🌟🌟🌟 hope @regina_mea · 7 Apr 2017
why is there still no feather emoji
4 retweets, 11 likes
 - FEATHER** @FeatherOfficial · 11 Mar 2017
OKAY WHY IS THERE NO FEATHER EMOJI!?? (Asking for a friend)
3 replies, 1 retweet, 35 likes
 - Stevie** @smkuenn · 10 Oct 2016
My kid asked to go to bed early. (Feather emoji) (person falling over emoji)
4 likes



cass

@_cassieroberts_

Follow



okay but honestly, who do i have to call to get a feather emoji??? @Emojipedia

1:37 PM - 16 May 2018

1 Retweet



mumdrah @mumdrah · 6 Oct 2017



Replying to @TeamRinsey

I looked for a **feather emoji** #knockmedownwitha



els @elliemthomas · 5 Oct 2017



Replying to @_Saaamm

Yeah you're light as a 🐣 (there wasn't a **feather emoji**)



Selection Factors: Exclusion

F. Overly Specific

A single feather can be used to represent the feathers of all birds, birds in general, the many cultural meanings of feathers across the globe, the many idiomatic phrases that use the word "feather," and the objects made from feathers.

G. Open Ended

The FEATHER emoji will not be adding to an existing group of feathers as it is the first of its kind.

H. Already Representable

While a generic bird and other specific species of birds already exist within the emoji library, the FEATHER holds its own connotations that cannot otherwise be expressed through the existing emoji.

I. Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The FEATHER falls under none of these categories, and is not trademarked by any single brand.

J. Transient

Given that humans have lived alongside birds throughout history and have always made use of feathers for decorative, practical, and cultural purposes, FEATHER will continue to have high demand in the future.

K. Faulty Comparison

This proposal for the FEATHER emoji is submitted on its own merits with no argument made due to inclusion of existing emoji.

Sort location

Category: animal-bird

It is proposed that FEATHER be categorized after BIRD and before PENGUIN, or alternatively, before BIRD and after FRONT-FACING BABY CHICK.

Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type: Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored: N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping: Simple Lowercase Mapping: Simple Titlecase Mapping:

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