

House Finch

Carpodacus mexicanus

The establishment of a population of House Finches in eastern North America 40 years ago was one of the ornithological events of the century. The species' original range included most of the western U.S. and extreme southwestern Canada south through Mexico. In 1940, an undetermined number of caged birds from California were released in the New York City area by bird dealers who were illegally selling "Hollywood Finches" (Elliott and Arbib 1953). Small breeding colonies and overwintering groups were reported during the next 20 years, primarily around New York City, Long Island, adjacent New Jersey, and coastal Connecticut. A rapid expansion occurred in the mid to late 1960s, which produced an especially strong spread toward the south and west and northward along coastal New England. House Finches also spread along major river valleys, particularly those of the Hudson and the Connecticut. By 1982 the eastern population of House Finches was found as far north as Nova Scotia and Ontario, as far south as Tennessee and Georgia, and as far west as Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa (Mundinger and Hope 1982). It is only a matter of time before the eastern and western ranges meet, as both populations continue to expand. Mundinger and Hope (1982) described in some detail the process and pattern of the growth phenomenon, using Christmas Bird Count data.

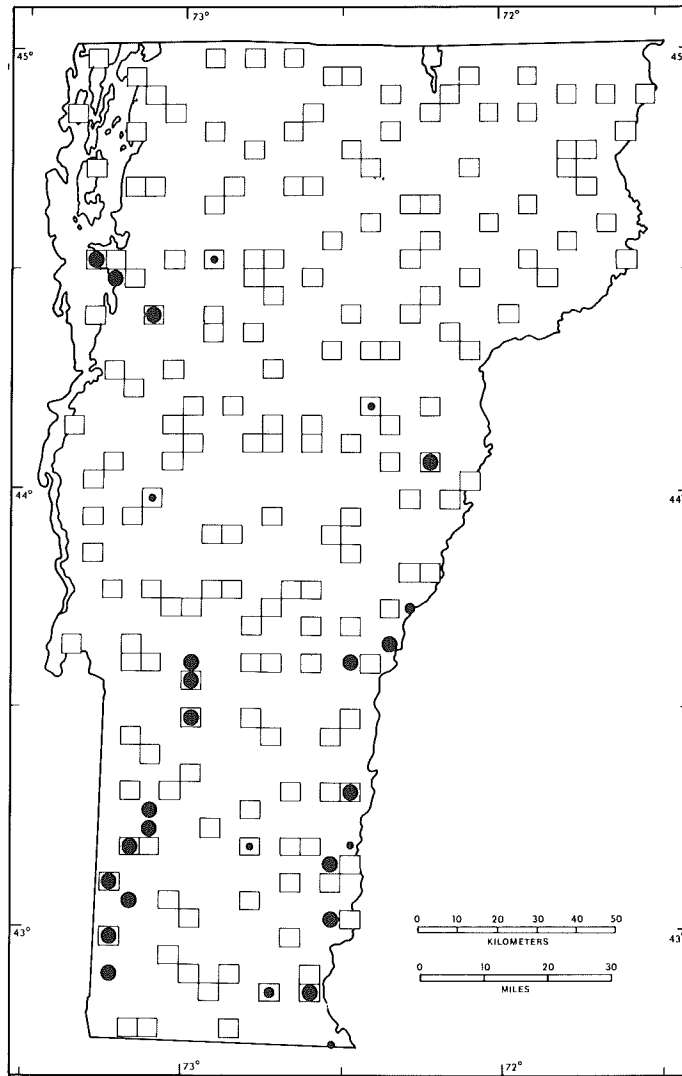
Vermont's first sighting occurred in Marlboro in November 1968, and was followed by two records in the spring of 1972 in Wallingford and Marlboro (RVB, Spring 1978). House Finches appeared on a Christmas Bird Count in 1975 in Ferrisburg. The first state breeding record is from 1976 in Bennington, where adults brought three young to a feeder in early July (ASR, M. Vince). The Vermont population of House Finches probably entered the state along the Hudson and Connecticut river valleys. The species is now well established in the state, and is locally common in low-lying areas with



villages or towns. It continues to be rare to very rare in the Green Mountains, North Central region, and Northeast Highlands. Although House Finches are essentially sedentary, during the seasonal movements that occur primarily in spring and fall the species may appear almost anywhere. As House Finches continue to spread to higher elevations and to more northern latitudes, observers can expect to find them wherever suitable habitat exists.

In the West, House Finches are found in a variety of habitats. In the East they are usually found near human habitation and are less common in rural districts. They frequent landscaped residential areas where open lawns scattered with ornamental plantings of trees and shrubs abound. They can also be found in the centers of cities and towns.

The species is gregarious year-round, and is a semicolonial nester. Adults defend a small but variable territory. The nest is placed in a variety of situations, 1.5–2.7 m (5–9 ft) above the ground. It is usually well concealed in the center of dense, often coniferous, foliage. House Finches may also nest in tree cavities, and they often use nooks and crannies on man-made structures. In Vermont, nests have been found in ivy and in ornamental conifers, above porch blinds, in hanging plants, and in forgotten Christmas wreaths. The nest is a well-made cup of whatever debris is available. Grasses and forbs, twigs and leaves, rootlets, feathers, and string are used. The interior is lined with similar but finer material. Nests are often reused for second broods and in sub-



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 15 (8%)

Possible breeding: 4 (26.6% of total)
 Probable breeding: 1 (6.6% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 10 (66.6% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	3	10	20.0
Green Mountains	2	4	13.3
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	2	10	13.3
Taconic Mountains	5	31	13.3
Eastern Foothills	3	12	20.0

sequent years (Bent 1968). One record for nest building in Vermont is from Burlington on May 9. From 2 to 6 eggs, usually 4 to 5, are laid. Incubation is performed solely by the female, and lasts 14 to 16 days. During incubation the male feeds the female by regurgitation. There are four records of nests with eggs, from Rutland and Shaftsbury, from May 13 to 21. The young remain in the nest for 14 to 16 days, and are cared for by both parents (Evenden 1957). Fledgling young were found in Rutland, Clarendon, Bennington, and Wallingford on June 21 and 29 and July 12 and 16, respectively.

House Finches eat vegetable matter, mainly seeds, supplemented with buds and fruits

from trees and shrubs. Birdfeeding stations have undoubtedly contributed to the species' prodigious spread. Since House Finches share many habitat preferences with the House Sparrow, some have speculated that the rapid increase of the finch in the Northeast has contributed to a recent decline in the number of House Sparrows (Kricher 1983).

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