

Purple Finch

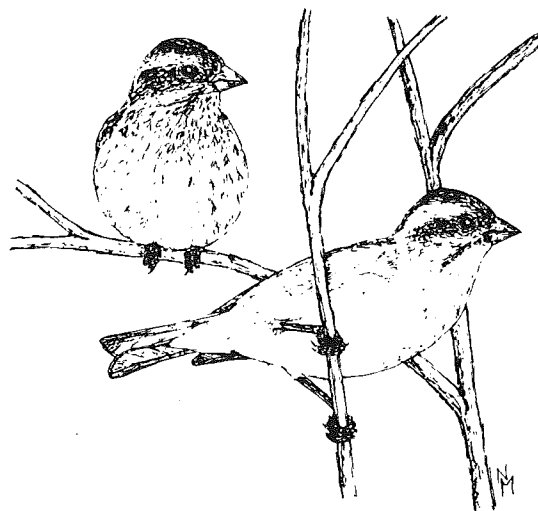
Carpodacus purpureus

The Purple Finch ranges through much of northern North America and south along the West Coast to northwestern Baja California. In eastern North America it nests south to southeastern New York, northwestern New Jersey, and central Pennsylvania, and in the Appalachians south to West Virginia and Virginia (AOU 1983). During the winter the species may occur anywhere in its breeding range and south to the Gulf Coast, but its numbers vary dramatically from place to place. Purple Finches are readily attracted to feeding stations, where they may be observed close up.

In some years Purple Finches appear in great abundance in Vermont, and in other years few are seen. The Purple Finch may be found in open coniferous and mixed woodlands. The species tends to frequent edge situations, and is frequently seen around blowdowns and clear cuts, in well-planted residential areas, and along back roads picking up gravel from the shoulders.

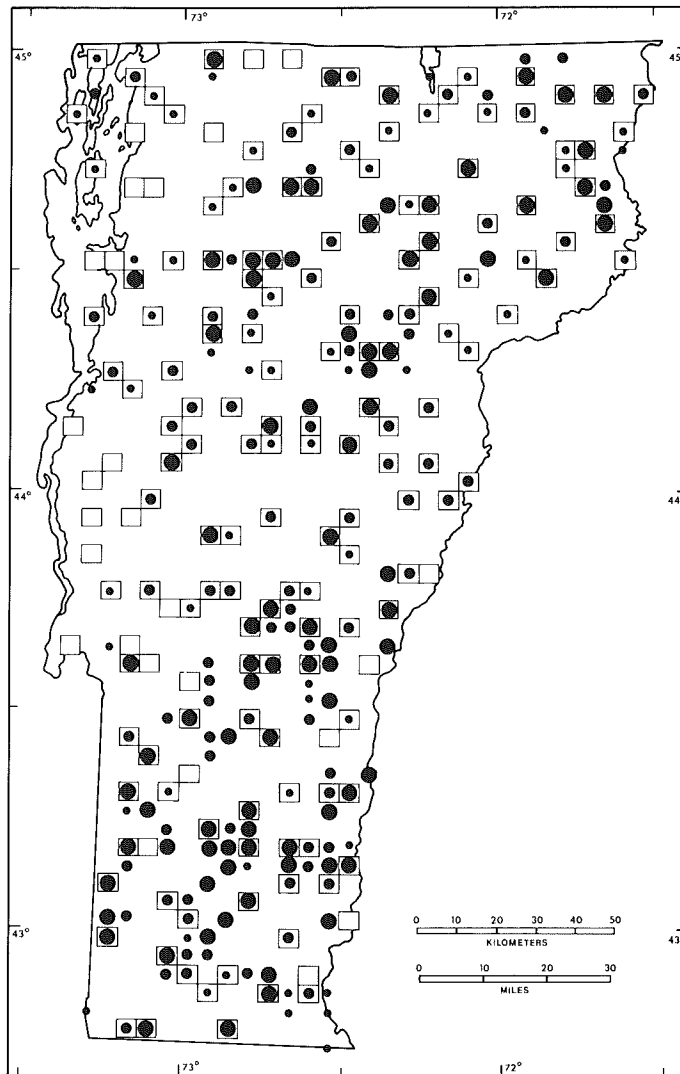
Although the Purple Finch may be heard in whisper song in late autumn and may occasionally burst into full song in late winter, it sings most frequently during the spring and early summer. The song is a brightly rendered, sweet, rapidly uttered warble consisting of paired notes and triplets with occasional mimetic notes (Remsen 1983). An observer familiar with its voice may locate this species by touring back roads with the car window rolled down. The nest can be located through a careful search of young conifers in areas inhabited by the species. About 15% of Atlas Project breeding confirmations in Vermont were of active nests. Dependent young accounted for 35% of the Vermont confirmations, and a further 36% were of parents observed feeding young. When begging for food, the young utter a plaintive two-note whistle; they are often brought to summer feeding trays by their parents.

Purple Finches may winter locally in large numbers when a sufficient quantity of birch



seeds or evergreen cones exist. Nonetheless, the species does not return to breeding areas until late March or early April in most years. The nest is a loosely woven cup of twigs, weed stems, bark strips, and grasses, lined with plant down, hair, or moss. The nest is placed in a trunk fork of a coniferous tree—most frequently spruce, although cedar, pine, and fir may also be utilized. Nests are placed 1.5–18.3 m (5 to 60 ft) above ground (Harrison 1975). The pale greenish blue eggs are lightly spotted with dark brown and black, with most of the wreathing on the large end. Clutch size ranges from 3 to 6 eggs; the average size of 28 New York State sets was 3.7 eggs (Bull 1974). Incubation is performed by the female, and lasts about 13 days (Forbush 1929). There are only three dates for nests with eggs for Vermont ranging from June 2 to July 3; records from neighboring states suggest that dates should extend back into May. A nest with 3 eggs was located on June 8, 1982 at a height of only 0.9 m (3 ft) in a cedar tree; the female was incubating. The young leave the nest at about 14 days (Bent 1968). The two Vermont nestling dates are June 8 and June 14. Dependent young have been reported on seven dates in Vermont, from June 18 to July 30. Family groups depart from nesting areas in September and October.

Over much of Vermont the Purple Finch is fairly common during the breeding season. During winter and migration seasons the



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 153 (85%)

Possible breeding: 43 (28% of total)

Probable breeding: 51 (33% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 59 (39% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	17	55	11.1
Green Mountains	52	96	34.0
North Central	19	100	12.4
Northeast Highlands	16	100	10.5
East Central	19	100	12.4
Taconic Mountains	11	69	7.2
Eastern Foothills	19	79	12.4

species may be uncommon to abundant depending on regional food availability. At two central Vermont banding stations more than 5,000 Purple Finches have been banded during 24 years of operation (M. F. Metcalf, pers. observ.).

Perkins and Howe (1901) considered the Purple Finch a very common summer resident; its status has changed little over the last 80 years. Atlas Project information indicates that the species is less common as a breeder in the Champlain Lowlands, the Valley of Vermont (east of the Taconics), and the lower Connecticut River valley.

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