

HOUSE FINCH

..... A LITTLE BIRD HEADED THIS WAY

by Geoff Hogan, Charlottetown

The House Finch, Carpodacus mexicanus, is a small, gregarious bird that resembles the Purple Finch in coloration and the House Sparrow in habits. The male adult is especially attractive with his bright red to orange throat, breast, rump and eye stripe and greyish back and wings. There are prominent dark stripes on the sides and belly. The female is a brownish grey bird with distinct stripes on the sides and belly but lacking the bolder face markings of the female Purple Finch. The male has a bright, finch-like song, if somewhat disjointed, that has qualities resembling a very musical House Sparrow.

The House Finch is a recent introduction to eastern North America. Unlike the notorious House Sparrow and Starling, introduced natives of Europe, the House Finch is a native North American species. Prior to the early 1940's however, it was not normally found east of Wyoming, Colorado and western Texas. In 1940 House Finches, captured in the west, were being sold illegally in New York under the name "Hollywood finches". When the authorities were alerted to this trade, the dealers, to avoid prosecution, released their captives into the wild. This was the beginning. House Finches were soon found breeding in New York State and have been on an explosive range expansion ever since.

In the past few years they have been observed in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The 1981 issue of American Birds lists numerous sightings from eastern Canada such as:

"House Finches seemed to have fully established themselves in Nova Scotia with a total of 7-10 pairs in 7 localities. Breeding is, no doubt, not far off."

"(Quebec)... the House Finch is being noticed more and more frequently."

"... as many as 6 House Finches were found coming to a St. John, New Brunswick feeder this summer (1981)"

"In the East, this colorful and musical finch is in a major population explosion and range expansion."

As far as is known House Finches have not yet been reported from P.E.I. but, judging by their close proximity, we may expect to see them soon. They will most likely be encountered in the vicinity of houses or barns, either in the towns or country, but may occur elsewhere as well.

New additions to our avifauna are of interest for both historical and ecological reasons. We therefore encourage all NHS members to become aware of this species and to report any sightings to our newsletter editor, Winnie Cairns, or myself, in order that we may have an accurate documentation of the arrival of the House Finch on Prince Edward Island.

References: American Birds 1981. volume 35 (2,4,5,6)

Bent, A.C. 1968. Life histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhees, Finches, Sparrows, and Allies. part I. Dover publications. New York. 602 p.

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