

AT A GLANCE: *October 1987* _____ by *Wayne R. Petersen*

The chunky body, short, deeply notched tail, and conical bill all suggest that October's bird is some species of finch (Family Fringillidae). Outside of this family, only the Savannah Sparrow bears a superficial resemblance to the pictured bird. However, the sparrow would not display the broad pale eyebrow stripe (beginning above the eye) or the dark cheek patch shown by the mystery bird.

Returning to options in the finch family, the length of the legs, the robust chest and body, and the head pattern all lead away from the bird's being a redpoll, despite any suggestion of a pale rump. Likewise, the heavy bill and the lack of a wing patch suggest that the bird is not a Pine Siskin. The absence of crossed mandibles eliminates a female or immature Red Crossbill.

Thus, the heavy stripes of breast and flank leave the viewer faced with a choice between either a female or an immature of the Purple Finch or of the House Finch. The dark cheek patch and the broad pale supercilium immediately point to Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*). Additionally, the robust chest and short neck are atypical of a House Finch. Female and immature House Finches appear to have longer, slightly notched tails, a more slender profile overall, a more uniformly colored facial pattern with no conspicuous supercilium or contrasting dark cheek patch, and a somewhat stubbier bill with greater curvature to the upper mandible. Also, what can be seen of the dusky flank stripes is not consistent with the heavier and broader stripes of the House Finch. From the photograph, it is difficult to ascertain the precise age and sex of the pictured individual. Viewing the original colored print, however, reveals traces of a reddish tint appearing about the head, thus suggesting a yearling male.

Barely discernible in the photograph is an absence of streaking on the belly and undertail coverts -- often a useful point of separation between the Purple Finch and the Cassin's Finch of the West. This finch was photographed in May 1987 at Magnolia.



Purple Finch

Photo by Bonnie Manning

AT A GLANCE



Photos by Alden Clayton

Can you identify the bird shown in these two photos?
Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.



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