

PINE SISKINS  
By Arthur H. Fast

Arthur Fast reports that during the winter-spring season of 1968-1969, he had, as his guests at his feeding and trapping station for several months, a continuous flow of migrant Pine Siskins. In the northern Washington, D.C. area, the Siskin is an irregular winter visitor, usually seen or more often heard, flying overhead, or feeding high on evergreen cones, often in mixed flocks with Goldfinches. Irregularity is said to be the "outstanding characteristic" of this bird. Tufts, "Birds of Nova Scotia" page 434; see also Bent's Life Histories, Bull. 237, Part 1, page 428.

This season the Siskins first appeared on Arthur's feeding trays in late December. Upon the arrival of the Siskins, the House Finches, which had been coming irregularly for several weeks, soon left. On January 10, the first Siskins (5) of the season were trapped and banded. They soon become established in limited numbers - usually 10 or 15, but up to 35. A total of 242 Siskins were banded, the last one on April 23. All were trapped; no nets were used. The last Siskin was observed on April 29.

After trapping for 2 or 3 successive days, the number of repeats in the traps usually exceeded the number of new birds. After waiting a week, the number of new birds in the traps greatly exceeded the repeats. However, of the 37 Siskins banded in January, 13 repeated in March and April. (The birds were fed but not trapped while Arthur was in the tropics during all of February and until March 7)

Sunflower seed was used almost exclusively as bait in the traps, and mostly on the feeding trays. Often the Siskins so monopolized the traps that the Evening Grosbeaks (also present and feeding at the same time) had little opportunity to enter the traps. Early one morning, 7 Siskins were captured at one setting of a 4 cell Potter trap. Except for an occasional bird, this is the second season in 23 years of banding that the Siskins have come to this feeding station; 200 Siskins were banded here in the spring of 1953.

For years, Arthur has given a spring party to local members of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, at his home. This year on March 29, 45 members were present from 10:00 a.m. for several hours and for lunch. The Pine Siskins and the Evening Grosbeaks, present in goodly numbers, were probably the principal attraction at the party. Many of the experienced birders said they had never seen Siskins at close range or in the hand.

