

The House Finch, a New Species for Mississippi

Jerome A. Jackson

Department of Biological Sciences, Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762

On 11 January 1980 Margaret Copeland and Elsie Croft discovered that House Finches (Carpodacus mexicanus) were visiting the sunflower seed stocked feeder at the Copeland residence in Starkville, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. I confirmed their identification on that date. At least one bright male and one female were present along with numbers of American Goldfinches (Carduelis tristis) and the usual assortment of Mississippi winter feeder birds. On 13 January I captured, photographed, and banded a male and female House Finch (Figure 1, Table 1). By 26 January more finches were present at the Copeland residence: Margaret Copeland, Robert Matthews, and I were able to simultaneously count at least ten individuals.

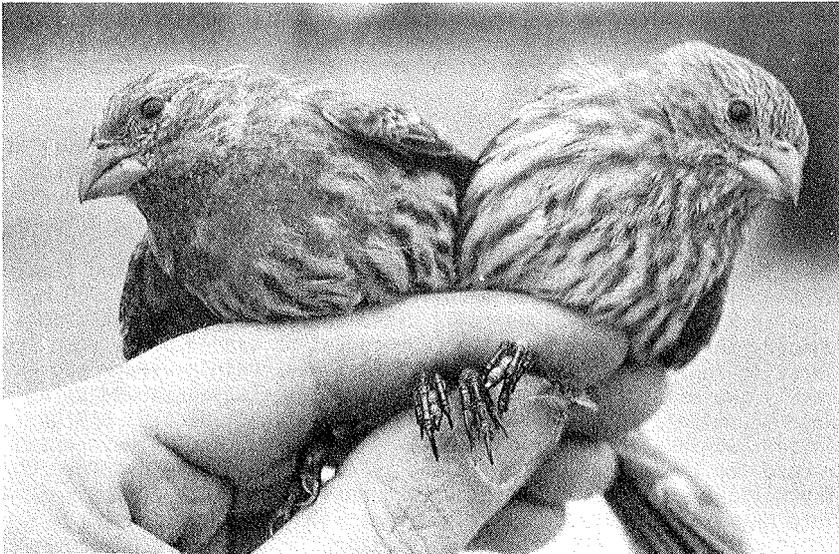


Figure 1. Male (left) and female (right) House Finches banded at Starkville, Mississippi, 13 January 1980. Photo by Jerome A. Jackson.

The Copeland House Finches were daily visitors to the feeder and seen by several individuals. On 8 February Ren Lohofener saw 13 House Finches including five males in the Green Oaks subdivision of Starkville approximately three miles from the Copeland residence and on 20 February he found 17 House Finches (about 8 males) near Leaping Warrior Creek, eight miles west of Starkville along Mississippi highway 12.

Table 1. Measurements of House Finches from Starkville, Mississippi, 1980.

Band or Specimen No.	Date	Sex	Weight (g)	Wing Length (mm)	Culmen from nostril (mm)
54 52314	13 Jan.	F	22.8	76	-
54 52315	13 Jan.	M	23.1	78	-
54 52321	16 Feb.	F	22.8	76	-
54 52322	27 Feb.	F	19.5	77	8.4
54 52323	28 Feb.	F	20.3	73	8.2
54 52324	29 Feb.	F	21.2	76	7.9
MSU # 962	16 Feb.	F ¹	20.7	77	7.7

¹Ovary granular.

Through February as many as 14 House Finches were seen daily at the Copeland's. By mid-March numbers of House Finches there were down: five on 21 March; three on 30 March; and the last seen during the 1979-1980 winter was one on 5 April.

The first House Finches of the 1980-1981 winter were two females seen on the Mississippi State University campus 2 December 1980 by Douglas McNair. In 1981 up to 14 House Finches were present from 4 January through 24 March at the Copeland's; no banded birds were seen. Three to four House Finches appeared at Audrey Bain's feeder approximately two miles from the Copeland's, and three males showed up at Joan McCamish's feeder in Greenoak's subdivision. Records at the latter two localities were in early spring 1981. The latest spring record for the species is of a lone male that Ray Weeks observed at Thelma Barnes' feeder in Columbus, Lowndes County, Mississippi, from late May through 24 June 1981.

Elsewhere in the state on 9 February 1980, Terrie Fairley and David Hamilton saw a male House Finch with Purple Finches (Carpodacus purpureus) at a feeder in Petal, Forrest County. Also, Judy Toups and Malcolm Hodges observed a female or immature House Finch on 18 November 1980 in Hancock County (see article this issue). This is the

earliest fall record to date as well as the southernmost record in the mid-south. Neither of these birds was seen on a second date.

The history of House Finches in the eastern United States parallels that of the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). The species was introduced by man near New York City and has rapidly expanded its range westward. Until about 1940 House Finches from southern California were shipped east to be sold as "Hollywood Finches" in pet stores (Elliott and Arbib 1953). Following protective legislation and under pressure from the National Audubon Society and Federal Government, pet dealers released finches rather than risk arrest. The finches were first noted nesting in the New York area in 1943. Bock and Lepthien (1976) summarize population growth and range expansion of eastern House Finches from 1962 through 1971, noting in particular that the birds were still "extremely scarce in the Southeast." House Finches had been found well-adapted to arid environments and perhaps limited by high humidity (Salt 1952), thus slow expansion into the humid southeast was predictable. Nonetheless, the species appeared in Birmingham, Alabama, in January 1972 (Imhof 1976). In recent years House Finch populations in the southeast have increased dramatically (Summerour 1980, LeGrand 1981, Hall 1981, Hamilton 1981). Laughlin and Phillips (1981) reported adult House Finches feeding a juvenile in Sullivan County, Tennessee, near the Tennessee-Virginia border. Thus far there are no nest records for the deep south, but such records seem inevitable.

Acknowledgments

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