



Songbirds of Missouri

House Finch

House finches, *Carpodacus Mexicanus*, belong to the bird family Fringillidae, which means they are close relatives of cardinals, goldfinches and buntings. The house finch's range was originally limited to the western states, but due to human involvement, it is now found throughout much of North America.

Before the 1900s, you couldn't find a house finch in this area if you tried. Today, however, the problem isn't seeing them – it's identifying them.

When it comes to naming birds at feeders, few species are mistakenly identified more than the house finch. Because of their similar coloring, the house finch and the purple finch are routinely confused. But there are distinct differences between the two birds. The biggest difference is that purple finches are **natives** of the eastern United States and house finches aren't. Before we learn how the house finch got to this part of the country, let's look at some house finch facts.

- House finches are relatively small songbirds, about 5 to 5-1/2 inches long.
- Their overall gray color is accented by a pinkish head with a narrow rose-colored line over the eye and a reddish breast that fades to a buff or whitish color towards the bottom.
- Like most other bird species, these colors are brighter in males than in females.

Because of their love for seeds, house finches are common visitors to feeders during winter, especially in **urban** areas where there are numerous feeding stations. **Courtship** activity begins in the early spring. Both genders sing, and the male follows after the female with fluttering wings.

Females incubate the nests, which consist

of two to six eggs. Eggs hatch in 12 to 16 days. After hatching, both parents feed the young. Nestlings usually leave the nest in 11 to 19 days. Females may raise several **broods** over the course of the summer.

Two of the best ways to tell the difference between house finches and purple finches are color and size. Purple finches are slightly larger and stockier and have more reddish-purple on their bodies than house finches. Additionally, house finches show up at feeders in this area more often than purple finches do. So if you see reddish-colored finch-like birds at your feeder, it's a safe bet that they're house finches. But that hasn't always been the case.

Before the 1900s, house finches lived solely in the western U.S. and their attractive colors made them popular cage birds. Many were captured and sold as pets before federal wildlife laws made it illegal. After that, many pet house finches were released back into the wild. Biologists believe the bulk of the eastern house finch **population** originated from the release of numerous house finches from a New York City pet shop in 1940. These house finches had been advertised as "Hollywood finches" because they came from the West Coast.

Today's eastern house finch population



House Finch



Purple Finch

Their similar colors make it difficult for many people who aren't experienced birders to distinguish the house finch from the purple finch.

is more prone than western house finches to contracting *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, a disease commonly known as house finch **conjunctivitis**. This disease infects the bird's eyes and is sometimes fatal.

Some **preventative** measures that will help keep the disease away from feeders include spacing them widely apart to discourage crowding, cleaning them periodically with a 10-percent bleach solution, removing any dirt build-up around the food openings and occasionally raking the area underneath to remove droppings and old, moldy seed.

Visit your nearest Missouri Department of Conservation office for more information about house finches.

Be a Bird Watcher!

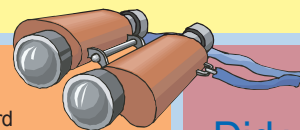
Look....

House finches are year-round residents of Missouri and at this time of year are frequently spotted at bird feeders in urban or developed areas. If you're interested in attracting house finches to your backyard, keep your feeders well-stocked with birdseed. Sunflower, niger (thistle),

white proso millet and canary seeds are their favorites. House finches will also help themselves to suet and nectar feeders. A bird bath that's regularly cleaned is also an essential part of any bird-feeding station.

...and Listen

House finch calls are made up of a "kweat" or "weet" sound and are usually voiced in a warble-type delivery.



Did you know?

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