

HOUSE FINCHES OBSERVED NEAR ANNISTON, ALABAMA

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A flock of House Finches (Carpodacus mexicanus) was observed by the author about 3 miles (4.8 km) north of Anniston on December 15, 1979, in a weedy field immediately north of Food World on Highway 21 and across from the Baker Gate entrance to Ft. McClellan. Thirty-three birds were counted and pictures were taken to verify the record.

On January 15, 1980, a total count of 41 birds was recorded, but shortly afterward the flock was joined by still others, increasing the number to an estimated 75-100 birds. The main attraction for this concentration was the abundance and availability of certain food items, particularly giant ragweed (Ambrosia trifida), small ragweed (Ambrosia artemisiifolia), and the berries of privet (Ligustrum sinense) which the birds descended upon in the swarming fashion of Cedar Waxwings (Bombycilla cedrorum). Cardinals (Richmondia cardinalis), Rufus-sided Towhees (Pipilo erythrophthalmus), Red-winged Blackbirds (Agelaius phoeniceus), Song Sparrows (Melospiza melodia), Swamp Sparrows (Melospiza georgiana), Field Sparrows (Spizello pusilla), White-throated Sparrows (Zonotrichia albicollis), and Fox Sparrows (Passerella iliaca) were also abundant in the field. This concentration of small birds attracted a Sharp-shinned Hawk (Accipiter striatus) which frequented the area and on one occasion was observed flushing and pursuing the House Finches.

The first reported occurrence of House Finches in Alabama was 5 birds observed on January 2, 1972, on the Birmingham Christmas Count (Imhof, 1976). The second occurrence was 9 months later on September 16, 1972, of a single bird seen by G.B. and G.C. Carlisle, also of Birmingham. Five years later a female turned up at Mark Brown's feeder in Decatur from January 27

through March 16, 1977. This bird was also photographed, thereby removing the species from the hypothetical list in Alabama. On March 5, 1978, Imhof recorded a male at his feeder in Birmingham.

In 1979, the frequency of House Finches in the State began to increase. Paul Kittle recorded a bird at Florence on January 26 and 27. On November 17, a female or immature was photographed by Roy Lowe in Decatur. A male was reported at the Birmingham Zoo by Buzz Peavy and was seen there from December 13 through at least the end of the year. The flock reported in this article was first seen on December 15, and is still there at this writing (February 1, 1980). The latest report comes from Birmingham where Imhof observed 6, all females or immatures, at Robert's Field on December 29.

The number of observations within the past year suggest that the House Finch may be expected to turn up with increasing frequency in Alabama and may possibly move into the area as a breeding resident within the next several years.

Literature Cited

- Imhof, T. A. 1976. Alabama Birds, 2nd ed. State of Alabama Department of Conservation, University of Alabama Press.