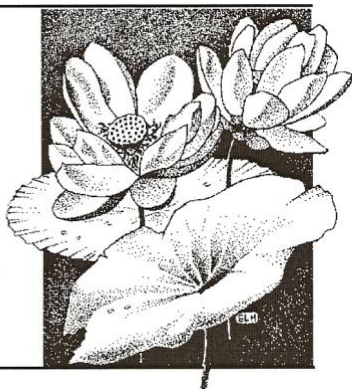


Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



APRIL 2021



Long Point *Phragmites* Action Alliance The Fight on *Phragmites* is Here!

The Long Point *Phragmites* Action Alliance (LPPAA) is calling on landowners in Norfolk County for help with the Long Point region *Phragmites* control program. *Phragmites* is an aggressive invasive plant that spreads easily. It can impact farm crops and operations by clogging drains and blocking access to irrigation ponds and can harm local biodiversity by crowding out the unique plants and animals that call Norfolk County home.

Since 2015, the LPPAA has been implementing a well-planned management approach for controlling *Phragmites* in the Long Point region that is effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

In 2019, the voluntary program expanded into the Big Creek watershed to control scattered patches of *Phragmites* hiding on farms and private land. This year the program is expanding across Norfolk County to continue removing *Phragmites* from the landscape and prevent this plant from re-establishing in the areas we've controlled so far! This expansion of services allows private landowners to access professional contractor services, specialized equipment, and aquatic herbicides for landowners in the watershed. These services are provided free of charge!

If you have *Phragmites* on your property and you live in Norfolk County, please contact the LPPAA. This is your chance to receive free-of-charge control services including exterminator assistance to remove *Phragmites* from your property!

Interested landowners are asked to contact the Long Point *Phragmites* Action Alliance at 226-231-0331 or by email at bigcreekphrag@gmail.com. Landowners can also join by visiting our website at www.longpointphragmites.ca.

About - The Long Point *Phragmites* Action Alliance (www.longpointphragmites.ca) is a collaboration of over 20 agencies and organizations working together to develop a united and well-planned management approach for controlling invasive *Phragmites* in the Long Point region that is effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible.



Secrets of the Hive

Article by Janet Ozaruk, Member of Waterloo Region Nature
(with permission)

Picture a structure, built by tiny animals, that's as complex as the Egyptian pyramids. A veritable fortress filled with many chambers, constructed by hundreds of individuals working together in an advanced society. A home that expands in dimension to accommodate the swelling population within. A home where the very material it is made from, is manufactured by its inhabitants. This describes the nest of the bald-faced hornet.

Early winter is a good time to spot hornet hangouts. These papery apartment buildings are often located up in deciduous trees, the fabric of the nest enfolding the slender twigs. Their presence is revealed as the trees discard their leaves. As an added bonus, the nest becomes inactive at this time of year. It's safe to approach and even handle a nest after it's been abandoned, and a killing frost has decimated the nest's erstwhile population. Paper wasps, honeybees, yellow jackets and hornets all nest in colonies. In the case of honeybees, the whole population overwinters by living off its stores of honey. However, with wasp, hornet, or yellow jacket populations, the vast majority of the colony dies off, leaving only the new queens. These queens overwinter by burrowing into the soil or protected cavities. Having been impregnated in the fall, they are ready to lay their eggs in the spring, thereby, starting a brand-new colony.



Inside the paper covering of a bald-faced hornet nest are several suspended combs containing chambers for larvae.
From Wikimedia Commons

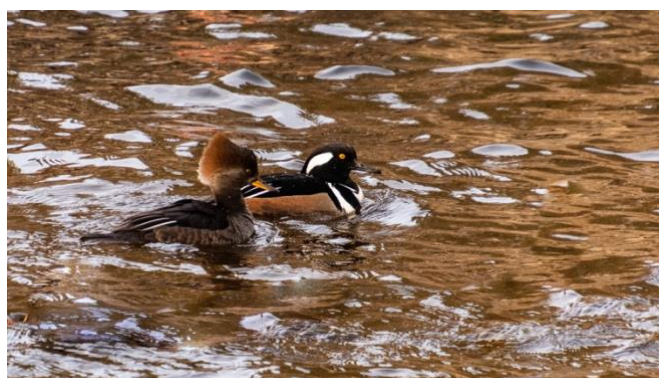
My neighbours had a fine hornets' nest sprouting from their crab apple tree. So, with their permission, I perched up on a stepladder and used gardening sheers to carefully clip the twigs holding it in place. It was shaped roughly like a turnip, rounded at the top and tapering to a soft point. The sole entrance into the nest was a one-inch diameter hole offset from the bottom. The nest's circumference at the widest point was 27 inches/69 cm, with a length of 15 inches/38 cm. I was surprised at how lightweight it was in my hands. It weighed in at only 4 oz/117grams. You really need to examine a nest up close to appreciate the artistry of it. It looked like a puffy quilted pillow made of soft newsprint. Bands of sand, grey and chalk-hued paper arced over the surface, the different colours reflecting the original source of the material. In the summer, I've seen worker hornets methodically chewing their way across dry wood on old unpainted fence posts and picnic benches. The wood fibres are mixed with the hornet's saliva and then spit out to form the thin, uniform layers forming the interior and shell of the hive.

There's nothing like some investigative work, so I spread out some newspapers on the dining room table, got a pair of sharp scissors, and said "Cover me, I'm going in!". I gently snipped away layer after layer until I had removed one side of the paper shell. Inside were four suspended tiers packed with hundreds of hexagonal cells. Each tier was attached to the one above by one or more sturdy stalks and was free of the outer shell. Each hexagonal cell, at one time, would have held an egg, which then hatched into an immobile larva. After metamorphosis, the larvae would have been transformed into a worker, male, or new queen. But now, this former "hive of activity", once protected by fierce warriors, lay abandoned and revealing its secrets.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT — FISHERVILLE

Report by: Linda Thrower

As a compiler I was lucky enough to have a Christmas Bird Count this year. A lot of people had to do double duty and cover more than one square to say this count was covered. So, with a lot of co-operation from the birders and the weather the Fisherville CBC was held on December 28th, 2020. It had snowed for Christmas which a lot of parents and Santa were glad to see. The luck continued with enough warmer temperatures and rain to take away all of that snow by the 28th. But luck can only go so far and once again the winds picked up just enough to send all of the smaller species of birds and even some of the larger ones into hiding. So, once again, those out counting birds were doing a lot more searching than counting. Records always have highs and lows no matter what the weather and here they are.



Hooded Mergansers

Photo by Len Grincevicius

- Pied-billed Grebe – 1 counted this year, the same as the last time this species was on the count in 2011.
- Horned Grebe – back on the count with 76 being seen last year and only 4 found this count.
- Double-crested Cormorant – this count the number was 2 and in 2012 5 were counted.
- Snow Geese – in 2016, 5 were counted in 2020, 2 were found.
- Tundra Swans – in 2016, 79 were spotted; this year 91 were seen.

- Ruddy Ducks – in 2016, 3 were counted; this count 1 was spotted.
- Bald Eagle – they did not care for the weather and they came in with their lowest number since 2006 when 2 were seen. This count they are up one.



Northern Cardinal

Photo by Jan Grincevicius

- Golden Eagle – is back in square 4 for the second time; also seen in square 3 in 2016.
- Northern Harrier – has its lowest number since 1989 with only 5 counted.
- Rough-legged Hawk – lowest number since 2006 when 6 were also counted.
- American Kestrel – highest number since 2005 when 44 were counted. This year was 41.
- Ravens have their highest number since 1989. Four were counted in 2017 and 2019. This count 6 were spotted.
- White-winged Crossbills – have the highest number since 2008 when 1650 were counted. None until this year when 15 were seen.
- Redpolls – have a high number with 338 this year. In 1993 857 were seen.
- Pine Siskins – have the highest number since 2008 when 26 were counted. This year 11 were seen.

Cont'd. on p.4

CBC Fisherville...Continued from Page 3

Here is the rest of the data:

Weather: 3°C, 30 km winds out of the south-west; light rain in the morning, late afternoon sleet; cloud cover 70%. Water was open.

Now all the birders who were nice enough to be out counting the birds, pandemic or not:

Pam Arthur
Cody Bassindale
Judy Boone
Mike Boone
Rob Crawford
Rick Dowson
Jerry Guenther
Audrey Heagy
Barry Jones
David Okines
Thank you one and all for all your effort!

Beth Powell
Bill Read
Jennifer Rogers
Jeff Skevington
Richard Skevington
Rob Smuck
Alan Thrower
Linda Thrower
Adam Timpf
Matt Timpf

The Species Counted were as follows:

Pied-billed Grebe	1	Rough-legged Hawk	6	Winter Wren	1
Horned Grebe	4	Golden Eagle	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	9
Double-crested Cormorant	2	Am. Kestrel	41	Eastern Bluebird	15
Great Blue heron	4	Peregrine Falcon	1	Northern Mockingbird	3
Snow Geese	2	Wild Turkey	171	American Robin	1
Canada Geese	2467	Bonaparte Gull	152	European Starling	2852
Tundra Swan	91	Ring-billed Gull	186	Cedar Waxwing	2
Gadwall	1	Herring Gull	81	American Tree Sparrow	169
American Wigeon	1	Gr. Black Backed Gull	2	Song Sparrow	6
Am. Black Duck	156	Rock Dove	324	Swamp Sparrow	4
Mallard	321	Mourning Dove	175	White-throated Sparrow	3
Mallard X Black Duck	8	Eastern Screech Owl	1	Slate-colored Junco	355
Red-headed Duck	2	Great-horned Owl	2	Snow Bunting	134
Ruddy Duck	1	Long-eared Owl	1	Northern Cardinal	104
Greater Scaup	667	Red-bellied Woodpecker	25	Red-winged Blackbird	7
Lesser Scaup	302	Downy Woodpecker	50	Yellow-shafted Flicker	1
Long-tailed Duck	2	Hairy Woodpecker	6	Brown-headed Cowbird	389
Bufflehead	147	Northern Shrike	2	Purple Finch	4
Common Goldeneye	158	Blue Jay	293	House Finch	218
Hooded Merganser	15	American Crow	276	White-winged Crossbill	15
Common Merganser	223	Common Raven	6	Common Redpoll	338
Red-breasted Merganser	169	Black-capped Chickadee	198	Pine Siskin	11
Bald Eagle	3	Tufted Titmouse	12	American Goldfinch	170
Northern Harrier	5	Red-breasted Nuthatch	11	House Sparrow	549
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	White-breasted Nuthatch	35		
Cooper's Hawk	3	Brown Creeper	3	Total Species	78
Red-tailed Hawk	98	Carolina Wren	4	Total Individuals	12,782



Tundra Swans

Photo by Diane Salter

What You Need to Know About Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a perennial plant and a member of the carrot family. It is a garden ornamental from southwest Asia that is naturalizing in North America and becoming more common in southern and central Ontario. Giant hogweed has the potential to spread readily and grows along roadsides, ditches and streams. It invades old fields and native habitats such as open woodlands.

Health Concerns: The clear watery sap of giant hogweed contains toxins that can cause severe dermatitis (inflammation of the skin).

Removal and Management: If you have giant hogweed on your property, it is recommended that you hire a professional exterminator to remove it. The guide to [Best Management Practices for Giant Hogweed](#) describes the most effective and environmentally safe control practices. For the entire report from Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program, go to: <http://www.invadingspecies.com/giant-hogweed>



Have You Heard a Barred Owl Calling?

There are few sounds in nature as raucous as the calls of Barred Owls. Listen to two pairs defending their territory in this Cornell Lab of Ornithology video. Go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5zc-NHlpw&feature=youtu.be&utm_campaign=GBB+C+2021+marketing&utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_term=video&utm_content=GBBC21+Nature+Lover+Lead+Nurturing+Email+1



Monarch Butterflies

Plants for egg laying and monarch caterpillars:

Members of the milkweed family including: common, butterfly and swamp milkweeds.

Plants for adult monarch butterflies:

High nectar sources including: goldenrods, purple top verbena, Mexican sunflower (Tithonia), Sedum, Zinnias, Butterfly bush, Brown-eyed Susan, Lantana, Asters (including native species such as New England), Purple and other native Coneflowers

Books/Leaflets:

- A Pocket guide to Butterflies of Southern and Eastern Ontario by Rick Cavašin
- The ROM Field guide to Butterflies of Ontario
- Peterson's Field Guide to Eastern Butterflies
- Caterpillars of Eastern North America

Website:

[Government of Ontario](#)



Photo from Wikipedia

CHECK THIS OUT!

Should That Baby Bird be Out of Its Nest?

– Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Nearly everyone finds a baby bird that is unable to fly well and seems lost or abandoned. What should you do?

To find more information, go to:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/i-found-a-baby-bird-what-do-i-do/>



Learn to Identify the “Tricky Finches”

– Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Finches are common visitors to many yards but are notoriously difficult to identify. Three species are particularly tricky in North America: House Finch, Purple Finch and Cassin’s Finch (western US). For more information, see attached chart.



Garlic Mustard Research

Here is a report from the New York Invasive Species Research Institute through Cornell University:

<http://www.nyisri.org/2021/01/research-summary-garlic-mustard-decline/>

However, some things to note about the summary:

- the word "may" in the sentence "Negative plant-soil feedback, in which plants condition the soil in a way that reduces the plant performance, may be a cause for the observed population declines". In researcher lingo the word "may" means further study is required to prove the hypothesis.
- "Long-term" is not defined and may be well beyond the patience of many invasive plant managers (as well as gardeners and landowners).
- If garlic mustard is impacting species-at-risk plant populations, the hands-off approach would not be feasible.



Urban Street Tree Biodiversity and Antidepressant Prescriptions

– Report from “Scientific Reports”

Growing urbanization is a threat to both mental health and biodiversity. Street trees are an important biodiversity component of urban greenspace, but little is known about their effects on mental health. We live in an increasingly urban world. The future of biodiversity conservation and people’s health depends on urban landscapes and respective urban planning decisions.

To read the whole report, go to:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-79924-5>



Blazing the Trail in Snake Habitat Restoration —
Learn what happened at the Stone Road Alvar Nature
Reserve. Go to: <https://ontarionature.org/snake-habitat-year-after-prescribed-burn-blog/>

Here's the Spring Issue of [Ontario Nature Magazine](#)

To receive selected information by email, you can
sign up:
ontarionature.org

**The Norfolk Field Naturalists
wishes to recognize with gratitude
the participants in**

The Great Canadian Birdathon
for their fundraising efforts on behalf of NFN.

**Betty Chanyi
Peggy McArthur
Mike McMillan**

**George Pond
Lisa Timpf
Anne Wynia**

Thank you!

**Insurance Adjuster: "Do you know the approximate
time you decided to jump out of your moving vehicle?"**

Me: "6:48 p.m."



A whole year has passed since the pandemic outbreak of Covid-19. By now, we have adjusted to keeping the social distancing, sanitizing protocols, etc. Vaccinations are now ongoing. Many of our NFN members fall into the age brackets that have been given priority for the vaccine. There is light at the end of this tunnel!

As before, the Board of Directors have been in touch by phone and email. Not a lot has emerged since the last report. Our financial status stands at \$50,219, according to the last statement from January 31, 2021. Since then, we have received the contribution from last year's Great Canadian Birdathon: \$7,092.50. Combining our more recent activity with the January information on GIC values, we have a March 31 balance of \$56,063. There may have been other credits and/or debits in March, which will show up on the next statement. A huge Thank You to all those dedicated "Birdathoners" who named NFN as their charity of choice!

Another item we discussed was the issue of advertising in the Lotus or directly to the Members by email. We have also been approached by various organisations to get involved with advocacy, mostly on proposed changes of laws governing sensitive environments and other environmental issues. Both of these items will be discussed further at our next Board meeting in April. We will also make plans for the program for the next season. More on this in the Summer issue of Lotus.

Weather permitting, the Board of Directors will be meeting in late April. It has been eight months since we last had a gathering of all Board Members. We'll follow the same format as last time. The meeting will be held in a front yard where everyone will have plenty of room setting up in a large circle. We hope the migratory birds will keep us entertained with their songs.

The next BoD Meeting will be held on April 22, 2021. The report from this meeting will be in the Summer issue of the Lotus.

Thank You!

**From Norfolk Field Naturalists to
Will & Morgan Partridge
Guardian Computing
For hosting our website**

Upcoming NFN 2021 Spring Events

**All events are postponed
until further notice.**



Hastings Drive, Long Point – Decision re: Use of Vacant Lots

The Superior Court of Justice for Ontario has issued a decision stating that placing a motorhome, travel trailer, recreational vehicle or recreational trailer on vacant properties along Hastings Drive is in contravention of Section 30 of Norfolk Bylaw 1-No. 85.

To see the full decision, go to:
<https://www.ontariocourts.ca/search-canlii/scj/scj-en.htm>

To see the Simcoe Reformer article, go to:
<https://www.simcoereformer.ca/news/local-news/judge-upholds-hazard-land-restrictions-on-hastings-drive>

Bird Feeders and Potential Trichomonosis Infection

The infection can affect all birds, but primarily sickens finches, since they tend to flock in larger groups. Trichomonosis spreads when a bird's contaminated saliva gets into water and food consumed by other birds, such as bird feeders.

For more information, go to:
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/trichomoniasis-deadly-bird-infection-fredericton-1.5902343>

Learn More About the Pignut Hickory

Learn more about this beautiful tree in an article written by Mary Gartshore, NFN member, LPBLT Board member, restoration specialist and naturalist. Go to: http://longpointlandtrust.ca/species-of-the-month-february-2021-pignut-hickory/?mc_cid=0416fa0ba3&mc_eid=967e29957f

NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to May.

Meetings take place at the **Vittoria Community Centre, 35 Oakes Blvd., Vittoria**. The meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 7:15 pm, programs begin at 7:30 pm.

**POSTPONED UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE**

NFN Mailing Address

**Norfolk Field Naturalists
PO Box 995, Simcoe, ON
N3Y 5B3**

Next Lotus Issue:

Summer 2021

Input dead line:

Friday, June 11, 2021

About the NFN

Norfolk Field Naturalists members participate in meetings and field outings, many of which are family-friendly. **Membership fees are \$20 Individual and \$30 Family.**

Donations are eligible for income tax credits. Charitable registration # 11905869RR00001

Guest speakers present programs on interesting and relevant natural history and conservation topics. Club members receive the Lotus newsletter with articles on local natural history and club activities. Copies of the Lotus are available at meetings, by mail or by email and posted on the NFN web site. Articles published in the Lotus reflect the views and opinions of the authors, but not necessarily those of the NFN.

www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org

2020 - 2021 NFN Executive with Contact and Project Information

President	Inga Hinnerichsen	All 519-875-5601	daveinga@live.ca
Vice-President	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	solymar@nornet.on.ca
Sanctuary	Peter Carson	586-3985	gartcar@kwic.com
Past President	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	solymar@nornet.on.ca
Treasurer	Peter Vaughan	429-5998	peter.vaughan70@gmail.com
Secretary	Cindy Presant	420-0953	cindy.presant@gmail.com
Director/Membership	Jan Grincevicius	428-6796	pwdtwo_2@eastlink.ca
Director Speaker Program and Field Events	Len Grincevicius	718-4216	portie_1989@eastlink.ca
Director Publicity	Cindy Presant	420-0953	cindy.presant@gmail.com
Director Environment	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	solymar@nornet.on.ca
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Director-at-large	vacant		
Director-at-large	vacant		
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Website Coordinator (appointed)	Lisa Timpf	226-440-2483	lisa.timpf@gmail.com
Butterfly Count (appointed)	Adam Timpf	429-4147	
Christmas Bird Counts (appointed)	Adam Timpf - Woodhouse Count	429-4147	
	Linda Thrower - Fisherville Count	905-774-1230	
Honorary President	George Pond		
Honorary Directors	Anne and Dolf Wynia		

TRICKY FINCHES

Learn to identify this challenging trio of red finches

THE CHALLENGE: Finches are common visitors to many yards and feeding stations, but they are notoriously difficult to identify. Three species are particularly tricky in North America: House Finch, Purple Finch, and Cassin's Finch. Adult males all show red coloration of varying shades and intensity, and females and immature males are brown and streaky. Although they may seem confusing at first glance, you can use many clues to help sort out this group. Keep in mind that Pine Siskin, female Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and other species may also resemble finches or be mistaken for finches.

KEY POINTS:

1. WHERE ARE YOU?

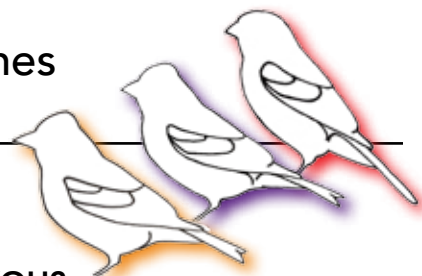
Location is a huge clue since the three species have different ranges and habitats

2. SIZE AND SHAPE

Look at the bill, head, wing length, and tail







3. COLOR PATTERN

Males differ in the shade, intensity, and location of red coloration; females have different head patterns and streaking



INTRODUCTION

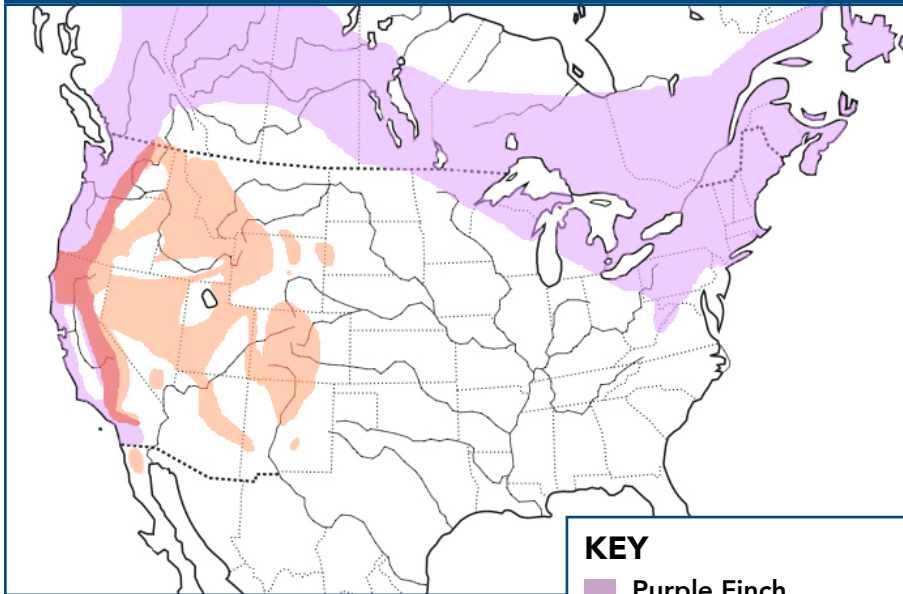
Which finches are we talking about?

	HOUSE FINCH	PURPLE FINCH	CASSIN'S FINCH
MALES			
FEMALES			

1. WHERE ARE YOU?

Before even looking at the birds, it is important to understand range, seasonality, and habitat preferences of each species.

SUMMER

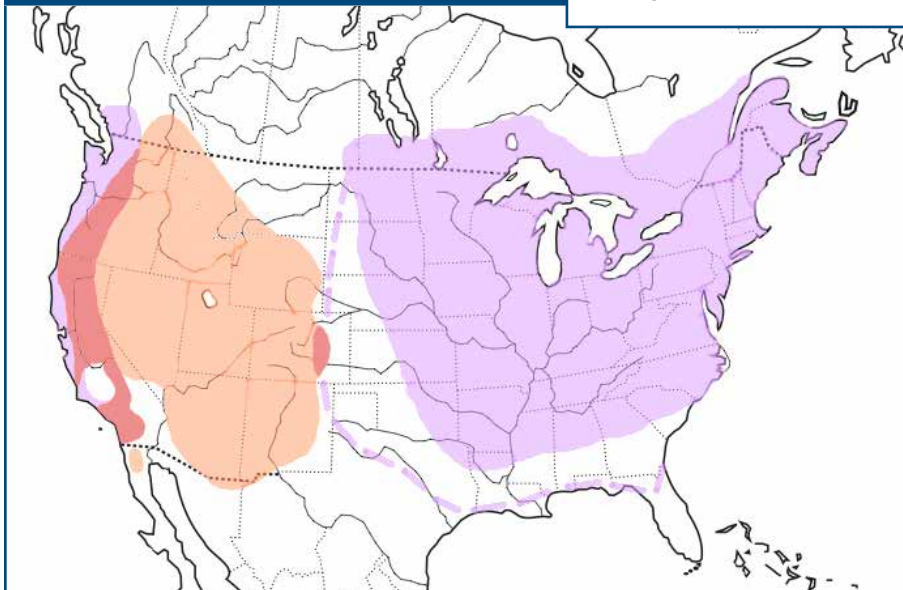


KEY

- Purple Finch
- Cassin's Finch
- Overlap

*House Finches occur throughout North America

WINTER



For dynamic range maps from eBird, click on the species' name at right or visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/map>.

House Finch

The most widespread species of the trio, and a common feeder visitor. It is found throughout the U.S., Mexico, and southern Canada. (Its broad range is not pictured in the range maps at left.) It is more often found in urban areas such as backyards and city parks than Purple or Cassin's Finch, but can also be found in more natural habitats such as open woodland, brushy field edges, and desert. It tends to avoid the high elevations often favored by Cassin's Finch.

Purple Finch

This species breeds in coniferous or mixed forests in the northeastern U.S., across southern Canada, and along the West Coast. In some years their range expands to include regions within the dashed line on the lower map. Purple Finch frequently visits feeders and backyards, but is less likely to be found in urban areas than House Finch. The population breeding along the west coast is a different subspecies, and prefers riparian areas and low-elevation oak woodland. It is not usually found breeding in high-elevation coniferous forest like Cassin's Finch.

Cassin's Finch

Lives in mountainous regions in the interior West. It is a year-round resident in part of its range, while some birds migrate south into Mexico for the winter. Cassin's Finch breeds in open coniferous forests and uses similar habitat in the winter, but may drift to lower elevations and be more likely to visit yards and bird feeders.

Please record your sightings of finches and other birds at eBird.org.

2. SIZE AND SHAPE

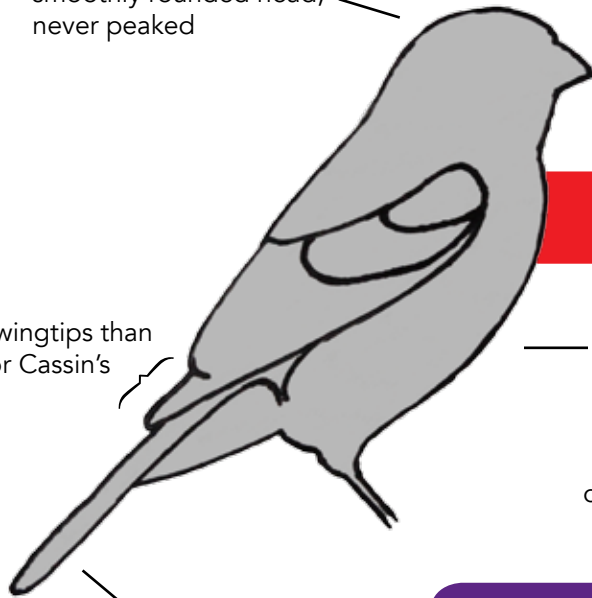
smoothly rounded head,
never peaked

short, rounded bill

◀ HOUSE FINCH

shorter wingtips than
Purple or Cassin's

overall rather long and slender



long, rounded tail
sometimes very
slightly notched

often shows puffy crown

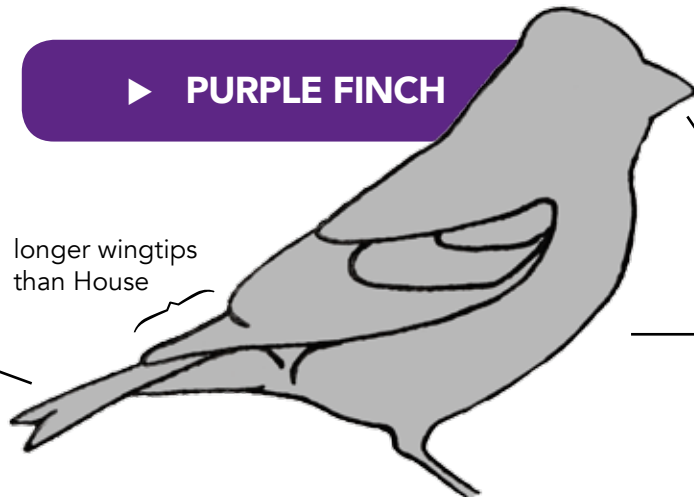
▶ PURPLE FINCH

longer wingtips
than House

notched tail

thick, slightly
curved bill

chunky body



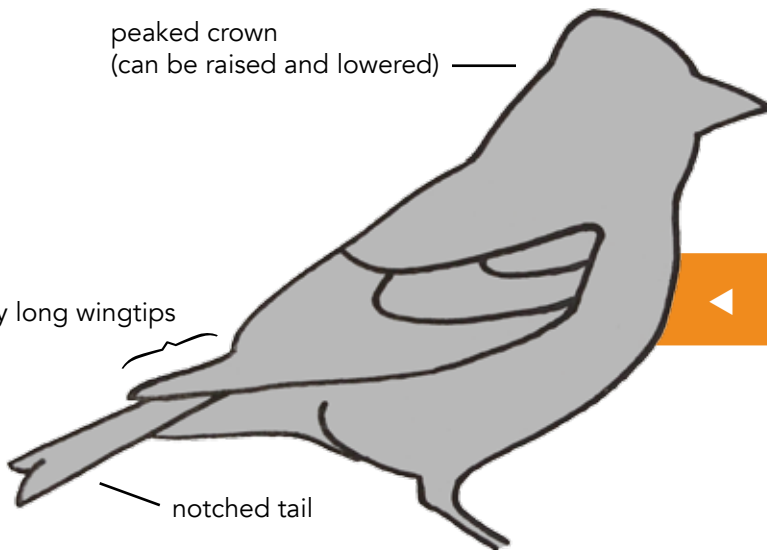
peaked crown
(can be raised and lowered)

long and usually straight bill

◀ CASSIN'S FINCH

very long wingtips

notched tail



3. COLOR AND PATTERN

MALES

HOUSE FINCH



Look for the contrast between red and brown. This photo shows how the red is concentrated on the head and breast, whereas the sides and wings lack color. Also notice the crisp streaking on the side of the body and the more curved upper mandible compared to Purple or Cassin's Finch.



This photo of a male House Finch on a feeder illustrates the more slender, long-tailed shape when compared with the other two species. Also notice where the red is concentrated: the head and upper breast, and the rump. Other parts look colder gray, with distinct streaks on the sides.

PURPLE FINCH



Here is a male Purple Finch on a feeder. The bright raspberry red color is obvious on the head and breast. There are no distinct streaks on the sides like a male House Finch would show.



Another view of a male Purple Finch, showing the overall bright coloration. The entire body looks infused with color, like it was dipped in raspberry juice.

CASSIN'S FINCH



The key on male Cassin's Finch is the very bright, contrasting crown. Look at how much darker rose-red the crown of this bird is compared with the pale pink color on the rest of the head and upper breast. Another clue is the streaked under-tail coverts: on male Purple Finches, these would be clean white.



Look at how bright and contrasting the red crown is on this male Cassin's Finch. The rest of the head, throat, and upper breast is very pale pink. The white eyering is unique to Cassin's Finch, and while more helpful on females, can be obvious on males, too.

FEMALES*

HOUSE FINCH



Female House Finches give the impression of a washed out, nondescript bird. Compare the uniformly pale brown head of this bird with the contrasting dark brown-and-white markings of a female Purple Finch.



Another image of a female House Finch that shows the pale grayish-brown coloration, the absence of much pattern on the head, and diffuse or blurry streaking below. The base color of the underparts is off-white, not bright.

PURPLE FINCH



This female Purple Finch shows a typically bold face pattern, with a bright white eyebrow and malar ("mustache") stripe. Also notice the distinct triangular streaks on the underparts and the thick bill.



Another view of a female Purple Finch. Check out the bill size compared with House Finch! This individual shows a particularly broad white eyebrow and malar on the face. The base color of the underparts is bright white, unlike the off-white color on House Finch.

CASSIN'S FINCH



The head pattern on a female Cassin's Finch is more contrasting than on a House Finch. Other features include the longer bill, shorter tail, and more peaked head shape. Compared with Purple Finch, look for the streaked undertail coverts and more subdued face pattern.



This photo illustrates the streaked undertail coverts of a female Cassin's Finch. Compared with House Finch, note the extremely long wings (see how far the wingtips reach along the tail?) and bolder face pattern (but not quite as bold as Purple Finch).

*Some first-year males are indistinguishable from females in the field.
However, the female-plumaged male birds often sing full songs, which females never do.

QUIZ



ABOVE: Looking at the left bird, we notice its shape: a smoothly rounded crown, short bill, relatively short wings, and tail without an obvious notch. Also look at the cold grayish color overall, and streaking on the sides. At first glance, it may appear to be a female—there's no red present. But check out that very subtle yellow wash on the face. This is actually a variant of male House Finch that is yellow instead of red due to an insufficient amount of ingested carotenoids. This variation is common in House Finch but extremely rare in Purple or Cassin's.

We see a helpful clue on the right-hand bird; where is the red concentrated? The breast is very pale pink, and there's a slightly darker wash on the throat and face, but check out that crown: intense rosy-pink. This prominent pink patch on the crown is the best sign of male Cassin's Finch. Also notice very little streaking on the sides, notched tail, and long bill (although this is difficult to judge at this angle).

AT RIGHT: We've got a tricky angle on these birds. The top bird is clearly a male with bright red on the breast and head. Even though we can't see much else, notice how the red only extends to the breast, and the belly and sides are grayish-brown and streaked. These features add up to give us a male House Finch.

The lower bird does not show any red coloration, indicating it's a female. The tail lacks a deep notch, which is a good first clue, but let's also look at plumage. The head is plain grayish-brown with no bold patterns, and there is streaking on the sides. This is also a House Finch.



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