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House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*

The House Finch is one of the most recently established breeding birds in Florida. It is abundant and widespread in much of western North America and became established in the East after the release of caged birds in the New York City area in 1940 (Elliott and Arbib 1953). Since that time the species has continuously expanded its eastern range.

Habitat. According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994), this species favors more open areas than the Purple Finch and adapts well to urban areas, where it utilizes ledges, human-made cavities and shrubbery as nesting sites. The female builds the nest, which is constructed of a great range of materials and lays 2 to 6 eggs. Eggs are incubated 12 to 14 days (Harrison 1975), and 2 broods are reared each season.

The species forages on weed and grass seeds, fruits of prickly pear and poison ivy, and some insects (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). It is often seen at bird feeders.

Seasonal Occurrence. The few Florida reports of breeding range from June through September, but breeding should be expected as early as late March (Hill 1993).

Status. The House Finch first reached Florida in substantial numbers during the winter of 1987-88 when it was reported in several locations in the Panhandle and was present in considerable numbers in portions of Tallahassee, with up to 40 birds found at favored feeding stations. This invasion coincided with an irruption of winter finches into the area, particularly Pine Siskins.

The species has been present in the Tallahassee area since this initial invasion. Breeding was suspected in 1988 but not proven. The first proof of breeding in the state came in 1989, when an injured juvenile was found in Tallahassee. By the summer of 1991 the species was relatively common in parts of the Tallahassee area, and a number of nests had been found. Breeding also occurred in the Pensacola and Crestview areas in 1991, and a singing male was present in Fort Myers in June (R. Repenning and R. Clark, VRF 1991).

The status of this species in Florida will warrant continued study, because the species seems likely to continue spread within the state. If the pattern of the first invasion is repeated, major range expansions can be expected to coincide with irruption years for winter finches. It will be interesting to compare the speed and pattern of establishment of this temperate species across the state with those of recent tropical invaders, such as the Shi Cowbird.

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House Finch

