

First Breeding of the House Finch in Mississippi

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Since the House Finch (Carpodacus mexicanus) was first seen in Mississippi in 1980 (Jackson 1981), it has been seen in winter, in small numbers, throughout the state. The first summer record was of a lone male photographed at a feeder in Jackson on 14 July 1984. It was periodically seen at the feeder through 20 August 1984 (M.V. Duvic, pers. comm.).

On 22 July 1985, Nellie Hughes found a male House Finch in a residential area of Starkville, Mississippi. The bird was later seen and photographed by Bill Hughes (photos on file at Mississippi State University). On 4 August 1985, a male and female House Finch were seen at the same location by Martha Ward. On 6 August, a pair was seen there by Nina and Jack Griffin. The birds were always seen in the gravel driveway of the Griffin's home and were apparently eating grit.

During the winter of 1985-86, House Finches appeared at several feeders in the Starkville area, but disappeared by late April. Margaret Copeland, at whose home the species was first seen in the state, has had a few birds in four of the five years since. Her first birds in the fall of 1985 appeared on 18 November, and she had up to 5 individuals through March 1986. George Weathersby, however, had at least 40 House Finches at his feeders in northeast Oktibbeha County during early spring of 1986. Audrey Bain reported at least one House Finch remaining at her feeder on the north side of Starkville through 15 April.

During the first week of July 1986, 2 male and 2 female House Finches were seen by Nina Griffin in her driveway on the south side of Starkville, and Nancy Jamison had House Finches coming to a feeder about two blocks away. On 11 July 1986, JJ observed an adult female feed a recently fledged young in a pine near the Griffin's driveway, and an adult male collecting grit in the driveway. Two hours later we saw a fledgling, an adult male, and an adult female at a tube-type sunflower seed feeder

at the Jamison residence (Figure 1). Each of the birds came to the feeder alone. When the birds left the Griffin driveway area, they flew in the direction of the Jamison feeder, thus we conservatively assume that there was only one nest. Nancy Jamison indicated that the House Finches had been coming to her feeder regularly, and that she had seen the female feed a fledgling at the feeder a few days before our observations.



Figure 1. Female House Finch at a feeder in Starkville, Mississippi, 11 July 1986. (Photo by Jerome A. Jackson.)

Jackson (1981) reviewed the literature relating to the rapid spread of this species in the eastern U.S. and the events leading to its discovery in Mississippi. Since that time, the species has been recorded nesting in Alabama, central Tennessee, and Arkansas (Imhof 1984, Jackson 1984, 1985). It seems certain that the species will ultimately range throughout most of the United States. The effects of such a range expansion, however, are less easy to predict. The House Finch is known to nest in natural cavities and bird houses, and may well provide further competition for our native cavity-nesters that are already beleaguered by House Sparrows (Passer domesticus), European Starlings (Sturnus vulgaris), and Budgerigars (Melopsittacus undulatus).

Literature Cited

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