

House Finch

House Finch

Appearance

Small, brown-streaked finch with a thick conical bill and notched tail. Sexually dimorphic.



Male

Rosy-red or almost orangish-red around the face, upper breast, and rump; streaky brown back, belly, and tail. Thick, rounded beak. Very weak wing bars.



Female

Thick grayish bill; streaked brown overall with blurry brown streaks on the breast and belly. Very weak wing bars. Immatures look similar to females.

House Finch

Appearance

Many finches have distinctly notched tails, but the House Finch has a relatively shallow notch in its tail.



Male House Finch with a view of his notched tail.

House Finch Appearance

In addition to its rosy-red face and upper breast, the male House Finch has a red rump .



View of a House Finch's red rump

House Finch

Appearance

The bright red on the heads of males is mainly on the eyebrow and throat, with brownish cheeks. Because the color in the male's plumage derives from the amount of carotenoids in its diet during molt, orangish or even yellowish males are sometimes observed.



Male House Finch with typical red plumage on head and throat.



A male House Finch with unusual yellowish coloring.

House Finch Sounds

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/>

SONGS

Males sing a long, jumbled warbling composed of short notes, typically from treetops. The throaty song often ends with an upward or downward slur and lasts about 3 seconds. Males begin giving their enthusiastic song in early spring, as early as sunny days in February, and even may sing throughout the year. Females sometimes give a shorter, simpler version of the song.

CALLS

Male and female House Finch calls are a loud *cheep* or *beep* given often, including while perched and during flight. You may hear a sharper version of this call as the birds flush from the ground.

Listen to the songs and calls at:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/House_Finch/sounds

House Finch

Diet

House Finches eat almost exclusively plant materials, including seeds, buds, and fruits. Wild foods include wild mustard seeds, knotweed, thistle, mulberry, poison oak, cactus, and many other species. Favored fruits are cherries, apricots, plums, strawberries, blackberries, and figs.

If we look inside a House Finch's beak, we see a groove that runs the length of the beak on the cutting edge of the upper half. The lower half of the beak slides into it perfectly.

When a finch plucks a sunflower seed from the feeder, it uses its tongue to maneuver the seed lengthwise into that groove. As it closes its beak, a slight back and forth action slices open the hull, and a small sideways movement husks the seed, while the tongue may help extract the kernel.

Now, it's quickly on to the next seed: maneuver, slice, husk and extract, swallow.

From: <https://www.audubon.org/news/how-do-finches-shell-sunflower-seeds-so-quickly>



House Finches have a short, convex bill, perfectly shaped for shelling their favorite seeds.

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Female House Finch eating a cherry



Male House Finch feeding on berries.

House Finch Range

House Finches are typically resident all year in our area, or short-distance migrants. Some House Finches from the Great Lakes move south for the winter. The range of the House Finch in the U.S. has expanded dramatically over the past 50 years; they were originally found in the West and spread across the eastern U.S. after being introduced to Long Island, New York in 1940.



House Finch

Habitat

As their name suggests, House Finches are well-adapted to our human-created habitat and can be found around buildings, yards, small conifers, and urban centers. In their original range in the West, House Finches live in natural habitats including desert grassland, chaparral, oak savannah, streamsides, and open coniferous forests at elevations below 6,000 feet.



Male House Finch standing on a wooden rail.

House Finch Behavior

House Finches are gregarious, highly social birds that are seldom seen alone outside of the breeding season. They can form large, highly mobile flocks of up to 50 birds. House Finches feed mainly on the ground or at feeders or fruiting trees. When not feeding, groups often gather near the highest point in a tree, calling loudly.



A group of male and female/immature House Finches feeding on the ground.



A group of male and female/immature House Finches in winter.

House Finch

Behavior

During courtship, the male House Finch touches his bill to the female's and pantomimes giving her bits of food. She may respond by fluttering her wings, mimicking the begging behavior of nestlings, which prompts him to feed her the proffered items. Studies have shown that female House Finches prefer males that are the brightest red, which could indicate his capability to find a variety of high-quality foods.



Female House Finches prefer males that are the brightest red.

House Finch Behavior

House Finches make their nests in a variety of locations, including deciduous and coniferous trees in the East, cacti and rock ledges in the West, and creative placements in or on manmade structures. They may make use of unusual sites such as ledges on buildings, streetlamps, and hanging planters. Sometimes they use abandoned nests of other species.



The nest is a cup made of stems, leaves, rootlets, thin twigs, string, and feathers with finer materials for the interior.
The nest is mainly built by the female.

House Finch

Behavior

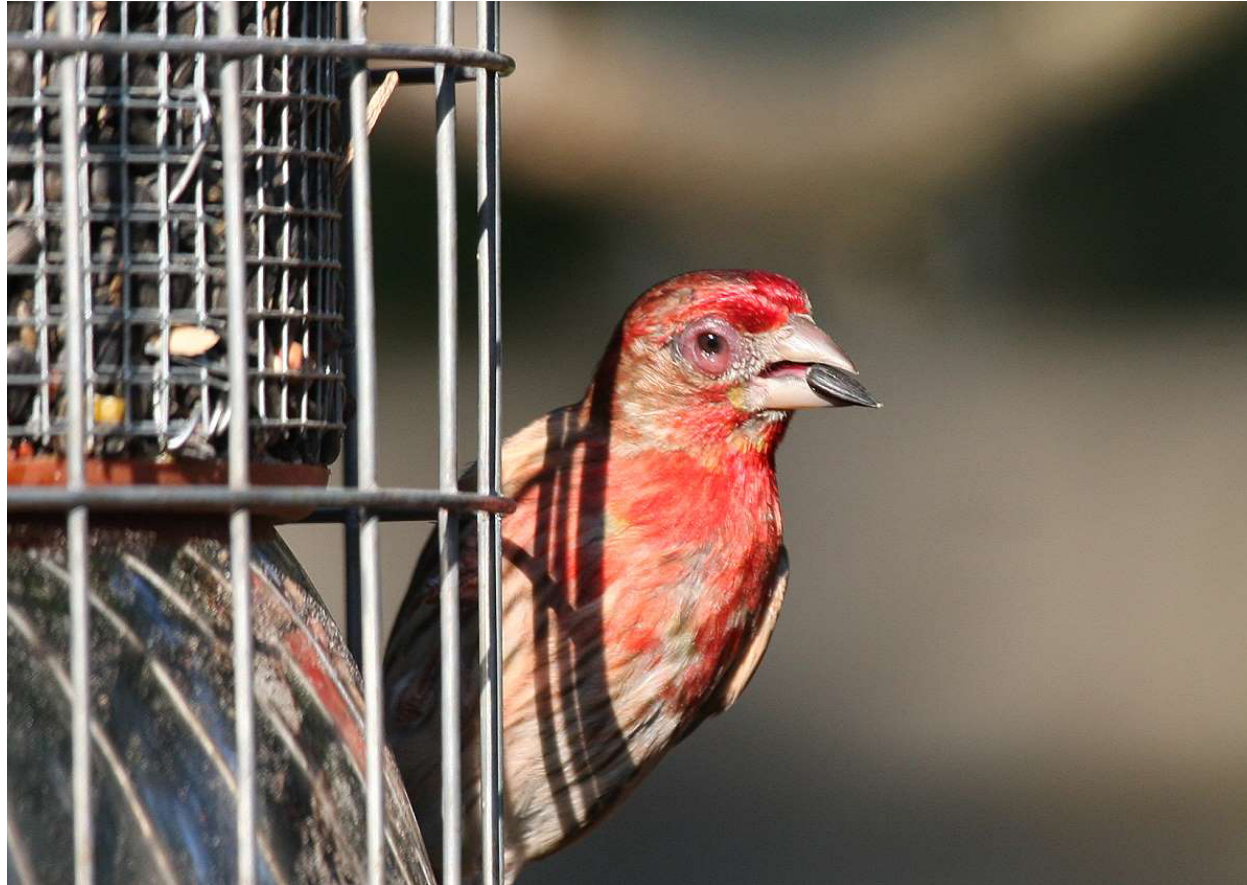
The female lays 2-6 pale blue or white eggs speckled with black and lavender. The young are altricial (born naked with eyes closed, dependent on the parents for food). The young fledge from the nest within 19 days. House Finches can raise from one to six (!) broods in a single season. House Finches are one of the few birds that feed their nestlings an almost entirely vegetarian diet (regurgitated seeds).



The male brings food to the female during incubation of the eggs, and both male and female finches feed the young after they hatch.

House Finch Behavior

House Finches are susceptible to avian conjunctivitis caused by a bacterial infection. When sick, they show swollen or scabby eyes and listless behavior, sometimes becoming completely blind. If you notice a bird at your feeder with these symptoms, take your feeders down for a few days and clean them with a diluted bleach solution to avoid spread of the eye disease.



A male House Finch with swollen eyes due to avian conjunctivitis.

House Finch Literature/Prose

House Finch, Invisible Beauty



House Finch Feeders

House Finches are readily attracted to feeders, and they come in flocks!
House Finches prefer nyjer (thistle) seed or black oil sunflower seeds.



Male House Finch cracking a seed at a feeder.



Female House Finch at a feeder.

House Finch

Names

Common name

House Finch

House notes the bird's adaptation to suburban and urban environments alongside manmade structures.

Finch refers to the family the House Finch belongs to.



Scientific name

Haemorhous mexicanus

Haemorhous Denotes its genus. From Greek *haimo*, meaning “blood” referring to the bird's color. House Finch is grouped with two other “American rosefinches” that have reddish males: Purple Finch and Cassin's Finch.

mexicanus The House Finch has the southernmost range of the three rosefinches and is widespread in Mexico.

