



WINTER FINCH INFLUX 1969-1970

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"And thick and fast they came at last,
and more, and more, AND MORE."

-Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

They came by the thousands and consumed sunflower seed by the ton. Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches poured into the Carolinas again last winter, staging an impressive encore to their 1968-1969 invasion. With them came an unprecedented number of Red Crossbills and House Finches. There were reports also of White-winged Crossbills, Common Redpolls, and Pine Grosbeaks.

Christmas count statistics in Table 1 indicate that Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were even more numerous this year than last. The Evening Grosbeak invasion, too, was exceptionally strong, rivaling last year's record-breaking flight.

TABLE 1. Christmas count totals for Evening Grosbeaks,
Purple Finches, and Pine Siskins for peak years in the Carolinas since 1961.

	<u>1961</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>
Observers/Parties	283/108	286/100	400/131	435/159	398/151	452/130
Evening Grosbeaks	134	284	840	12	1946	1672
Purple Finches	410	863	1889	1309	1551	2160
Pine Siskins	118	3348	5766	87	1869	3513

The earliest sightings of northern finches were recorded in the latter half of October. The vanguard was rather light and confined mainly to the upper piedmont section of North Carolina. Signs of a massive invasion did not become generally apparent until December when the winter finches began spreading along the coast and down into South Carolina. Many observers throughout the region took careful note of the Evening

TABLE 2. *Peak flock sizes and arrival departure dates of Evening Grosbeaks at various locations in the Carolinas during the 1969 - 1970 season.*

Place	First Date - Last Date	Peak Flock Size	Observers
Coast and Coastal Plain			
Morehead City, N.C.	21 Dec. - 7 May	100	Fussell, Lincoln
New Bern, N.C.	15 Dec. - 25 April	25 - 30	Card, Leland
Charleston, S.C.		75	Beckett
Mullins, S.C.	18 Dec. - 2 May	120	Bethea
Piedmont			
Henderson, N.C.		200	Harris
Chapel Hill, N.C.	12 Nov. - 8 May	150	Geist, Teulings
Greensboro, N.C.	27 Dec. - 24 April	10	Schiffman
Winston-Salem, N.C.	22 Nov. - 11 May		Snively
Raleigh, N.C.	31 Oct. - 9 May		LeGrand
Southern Pines, N.C.	1 Nov. - 9 May	80 - 90	Carter
Salisbury, N.C.		120	Owens
Hickory, N.C.		20	Underwood
Gastonia, N.C.	31 Dec. - 11 May	73	Hampton
Charlotte, N.C.	10 Dec. - 27 April	26	Norwood
Hartsville, S.C.	14 Dec. - 17 April	100 - 125	Morrison
Eastover, S.C.		70	Faver
Clemson, S.C.	28 Dec. - 1 April	16	Gage
Aiken, S.C.	28 Dec. - 6 May	25 - 30	Hatcher
N. Augusta, S.C.	20 Dec. - 2 May	25 - 30	Knighton
Mountain			
W. Jefferson, N.C.	10 Jan. - 15 April	100	Rader
Boone, N.C.	Mid-Dec. - Mid-April	50	Simpson
Swannanoa, N.C.	13 Dec. - 9 May	67	Ruiz
Hendersonville, N.C.		19	Raymond
Brevard, N.C.	Mid-Dec. - Mid-April	50	Crunkleton
Highlands, N.C.	Mid-Dec. - Mid-April	50	Hutchinson

Grosbeaks, logging the dates of arrival, largest flocks seen, and departure times. This information, summarized in Table 2, gives an overall picture of the breadth and magnitude of the grosbeaks' invasion.

At Southern Pines, N.C., Jay Carter reported banding 307 Evening Grosbeaks, 874 Purple Finches, 395 Pine Siskins, and 4 Red Crossbills. Active banding programs were also carried on at Rocky Mount, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, Reidsville, and Winston-Salem. In all, over 6,000 northern finches were banded in North Carolina last winter. Recoveries of a number of previously banded birds were also recorded, yielding the information tabulated in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

HOUSE FINCHES

With this species we are seeing a very interesting story unfold. From an introduced colony on Long Island, New York, House Finches have steadily expanded their range along the eastern seaboard. They have been making winter appearances in North Carolina

since 1962 and first reached South Carolina during the winter of 1966-1967 (*Chat*, 31:45-49, 1967). This last season they staged what could be called an "invasion," with occurrences widely spread over the piedmont and as far south as Sumter, S.C. It was by far the strongest influx of House Finches yet recorded in the Carolinas. The locations of the sightings are mapped in Figure 1. Specific dates, places, and numbers of birds seen are listed in Table 6.

It will be fascinating to watch what happens during the next few years as the eastern population of House Finches continues to grow. Almost certainly we will see larger and larger numbers of these birds wintering in the Carolinas. Also there is a possibility that nesting will eventually take place in the region. To document future events, it is important for us to watch closely for House Finches. Tips and photographs to aid identification are given in the June 1967 issue of *Chat*, (31:48-49).

TABLE 3. *Pine Siskin recoveries.*

Date Banded	Banding Location	Date Recovered	Place Recovered
26 Jan. 1969	Middleboro, Mass.	4 April 1970	Southern Pines, N.C.
1 Feb. 1969	Raleigh, N.C.	7 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
25 Mar. 1969	Raleigh, N.C.	5 March 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
1 Jan. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.	4 April 1970	Chevy Chase, Md.

Table 4. *Evening Grosbeak recoveries.*

Date Banded	Banding Location	Date Recovered	Place Recovered
9 Feb. 1964	Schenectady, N.Y.	7 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
4 May 1966	Manchester, N.H.	9 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
1 Mar. 1969	Knoxville, Tenn.	17 March 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
11 Apr. 1969	Raleigh, N.C.	5 Feb. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
19 Dec. 1969	Mt. Pocono, Pa.	13 Jan. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
24 Dec. 1969	Southern Pines, N.C.	28 March 1970	Raleigh, N.C.
26 Jan. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.	8 April 1970	Raleigh, N.C.

TABLE 5. *Purple Finch recoveries.*

Date Banded	Banding Location	Date Recovered	Place Recovered
27 Jan. 1966	Chevy Chase, Md.	4 Dec. 1969	Chapel Hill, N.C.
16 Mar. 1966	Yorktown, Va.	23 Feb. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
26 Feb. 1967	Ada, Michigan	27 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
24 Jan. 1968	Chapel Hill, N.C.	30 Jan. 1970	Mt. Olive, N.C.
1 Nov. 1968	Fairlee, Md.	12 Feb. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
15 Mar. 1969	Nashville, Tenn.	4 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
29 Apr. 1969	Moultonboro, N.H.	7 April 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
23 Dec. 1969	Southern Pines, N.C.	9 March 1970	Manning, S.C.
3 Jan. 1970	Southern Pines, N.C.	10 March 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.
3 Mar. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.	22 March 1970	Hillsborough, N.C.
30 Mar. 1970	Chapel Hill, N.C.	27 April 1970	Ridgewood, N. J.

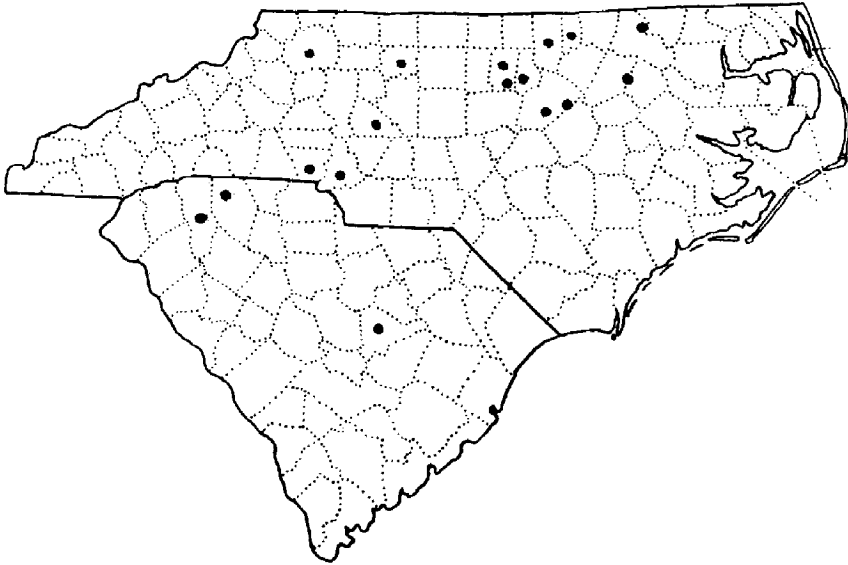


FIGURE 1. *Distribution of House Finch sightings in North and South Carolina during the winter of 1969 - 1970.*

TABLE 6. *Occurrences of House Finches in the Carolinas during the 1969 - 1970 season.*

Place	First Date - Last Date	Maximum Count	Observers
Oxford, N.C.	8 January - 1 April	25	Lappi
Henderson, N.C.	1 January - late March	27	Harris
Roanoke Rapids, N.C.	7 February	2	Lynch
N. Wilkesboro, N.C.	2 April	1	Smith
Winston-Salem, N.C.	21 December - 21 March	2	Snavelly, Witherington
Hillsborough, N.C.	15 November - 1 January	2	Blake
Chapel Hill, N.C.	Late October - 28 March	8	Geist, Lappi
Durham, N.C.	mid-winter	5	Pyne, Stuart, Pulliam
Rocky Mount, N.C.	Late December - late March	53	Davis
Raleigh, N.C.	21 January - 28 March	10	Grant, LeGrand
Wendell, N.C.	9 January	2	Underhill
Salisbury, N.C.	29 January - 25 March	6	Owens
Charlotte, N.C.	6 December - 11 March	1	Norwood
Gastonia, N.C.	17 November - 7 April	7	Hampton
Greenville, S.C.	12 January - 14 April	5	Grimm, Nickerson
Gramlin, S.C.	18 December	1	Woodfin
Sumter, S.C.	25 December - 30 March	1	Dabbs

RED CROSSBILLS

Red Crossbills were unusually abundant in the mountains. A total of 275 were tallied on 28 December in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the largest number ever recorded there in a Christmas count. Mark Simpson, on several fall and early winter visits to the Mt. Mitchell area (elevation 6,100 to 6,684 feet), found Red Crossbills in flocks up to 150 birds. Fred Behrend reported flocks of several hundred on Roan Mountain during January and February.

But a real surprise of the season was a general influx of Red Crossbills into the piedmont. In the past, even in peak finch years, Red Crossbills have usually appeared only in the higher North Carolina mountains and have seldom wandered in significant numbers into other sections of the region. This time they ranged from the mountains over much of the piedmont area. Because nothing like this has happened in recent memory, it is worthwhile to mention the various places where they were seen. Christmas counts showed them present at North Wilkesboro, Elkin, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Southern Pines, and Charlotte (see *Chat*, 34:10-19, 1970). Later in the season they were found at Roanoke Rapids, Hillsborough, Statesville, Hickory, Salisbury, Tryon, and down into South Carolina at Greenville and Clemson. Thus, their range extended over most of the region west of the fall line. In addition, there was a single coastal occurrence reported from Bodie Island where 14 Red Crossbills were sighted on the Christmas count, 30 December.

From first sighting to last, the winter stay of Red Crossbills in the Carolina piedmont extended over 7½ months. They were first seen on 5 November (Raleigh) and last seen on 20 June (Chapel Hill). Through the whole period, the birds seemed to have no difficulty finding adequate natural food, for they generally shunned backyard feeders. At Chapel Hill, I frequently observed small flocks of 6 to 15 Red Crossbills foraging in the tops of pine trees. Pine seeds seemed to be a favorite food.

Sixty Red Crossbills were counted at Umstead Park near Raleigh on 22 November (LeGrand). This was probably the largest single concentration seen outside of the mountains, although flocks of 40 to 50 were reported during mid-winter at Winston-Salem and Statesville.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS AND COMMON REDPOLLS

White-winged Crossbills were present on the higher mountains, but apparently none ventured down into the piedmont. Two were recorded on the Christmas count in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 28 December. On 1 February, a party led by Fred Behrend found at least 250 White-wings in mixed flocks with Red Crossbills on Roan Mountain (elevation 5,500 to 6,285 feet).

Three sightings of Common Redpolls were reported. On the coast at Bodie Island, N.C., two redpolls were found on 30 December (Christmas count) and one was present at Hertford in Perquimans County, N.C., during January (*Chat*, 34:51, 1970). In the mountains a single redpoll briefly visited Bob Ruiz's feeder at Swannanoa, N.C., on 3 February.

PINE GROSBEAKS

Pine Grosbeaks have been rare visitors during previous northern finch invasions. There are only seven published records for the Carolinas (see *Chat*, 33:1-2, 1969), and no specimens have yet been taken in the region. It is therefore significant to report two new occurrences this past season. The first sighting came in late fall from the mountains when, on 30 November, Mr. and Mrs. Garvin Hughes found a small flock of six Pine Grosbeaks in spruce-fir forest on the North Carolina side of Roan Mountain. These birds were studied in good light for several minutes as they foraged in the top of a fir tree. The second record of the season came in late spring when Dan F. Keeney of Falls Church,

Virginia, while on a visit to Raleigh, N.C., found two Pine Grosbeaks on the grounds of Plantation Inn, 5 miles north of the city. Dr. Keeney's description of the incident follows:

"On Saturday, 30 May, 1970 at 7 AM, in the tall pine trees in front of the Inn, I saw two birds that appeared to be grosbeaks feeding on pine cones. The morning was heavily overcast and it was difficult to see any identifying color on them, but I watched them for about 25 minutes with Zeiss 8 x 50 binoculars, during which time they moved several times, but would spend long periods working on a single pine cone. Eventually I was able to distinguish that one bird was dark red with dark wings and white wing bars and the other was a dull buffy gray, also with white wing bars. They were undoubtedly a pair of Pine Grosbeaks. I did not hear any distinctive song, but only occasional weak, nondescript cheeps.

"It is my impression that these birds were way out of their territory and that 30 May was certainly unusually late for any sighting this far south, but there is no doubt in my mind that they were Pine Grosbeaks."

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The information compiled in this report came from observations made by the contributors listed below. The excellent data they provided will have lasting usefulness when future finch invasions are compared with last season's events.

North Carolina

Brevard - Charles F. Hutchinson
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 Cary - Owen Turbille
 Chapel Hill - Helen Cruckford, Robert M. Geist, Mrs. Ed Lappi, Elizabeth P. Teulings
 Charlotte - Mr. and Mrs. Joe Norwood
 Durham - Gard W. Otis, Johnnie Payne, Ron Pulliam, George and Mary Pyne, Wilma Stuart
 Franklin - Mary Enloe
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 Greensboro - Etta Schiffman
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 Highlands - Toliver Crunkleton
 Hillsborough - Charles Blake
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 Morehead City - Charles R. Lincoln, Bob Simpson
 New Bern - E.T. Card, Mrs. Leland Mason
 North Wilkesboro - Wendell P. Smith
 Raleigh - Gilbert Grant, Robert Hadier, Edmund LeGrand, Harry LeGrand, Gail Whitehurst
 Reidsville - Ruth and Bill Noonan
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 Rocky Mount - Betty and Lloyd Davis
 Salisbury - H. Mack Owens
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South Carolina

Aiken - John B. Hatcher
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 Charleston - Ted Beckett
 Clemson - Gaston Gage, Mrs. Kenney R. Helton
 Due West - J.D. Copeland
 Eastover - Annie R. Faver
 Effingham - E.C. Clyde
 Granville - Lids Woodfill
 Greenville - Barbara Nickerson, Jay Shuler, William Grimm
 Hartsville - Mrs. A.E. Morrison
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 North Augusta - Gerald Kingdon
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