

Status of the House Finch in South Carolina, Including Discovery of Two Nests in Clemson

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We here review the status of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) in South Carolina and report discovery of two nests of House Finches located in South Carolina. Neither nest produced young.

The occurrence of House Finches in South Carolina through 1979 has been summarized by Potter et al. (1980). Apparently the first individual was observed in Greenville on 20 December 1966 (Grimm and Shuler 1967). In March 1967 a male House Finch was trapped, banded, and photographed in hand at Hartsville (Morrison 1967). Tail feathers from this bird provide the first material evidence of the House Finch from South Carolina (CM 58.27). The third published record is of an individual in Sumter in the winter of 1972-1973 (Teulings 1973).

Numbers recorded on Christmas counts have increased steadily since 1974, when five were reported from Clemson (LeGrand 1975; Table 1). LeGrand (1977) pointed out that the birds were most frequently found in the piedmont; his notion has been thoroughly confirmed in subsequent years.

Breeding in South Carolina was first suspected near Rock Hill in 1976 (Boatwright 1977, LeGrand 1977), a year after the first breeding record in the Carolinas was made at Charlotte, N.C. (Teulings 1975). The first conclusive breeding record for South Carolina was reported by Grimm (1979) from Greenville in 1979. Breeding may also have occurred at Columbia in 1982 (Eggleston 1983). However, each of these records consisted of fledged young or family groups, not of an actual nest. By all indications, the population of the birds in this state, as elsewhere in the East, is expanding rapidly (Bock and Lepthien 1976, Potter et al. 1980, Hamel et al. 1982, Kricher 1983).

On 13 May 1983 at 1525 EST, Hamel found a nest of House Finches with a female incubating two eggs. This was the first recorded nesting of the species in the Clemson area. As in earlier reports (Eggleston 1983, Ballard 1980, Grimm 1979, Boatwright 1977), the birds were nesting in suburban habitat. We began watching the pair on 25 April when we first heard singing by the male and saw him feeding the female in the courtyard between two classroom buildings on the Clemson University campus. During the next 3 weeks we frequently noted singing by both members of the pair. On numerous occasions the female begged for and received food from the male. Their activities were concentrated in an area of about 4 ha including several campus buildings, lawns, a number of small River Birches (*Betula nigra*), isolated mature oaks, and many ornamental shrubs. The nest was 2.1 m above ground, near the top of a small ornamental shrub (*Juniperus* sp.). Only 5 minutes after Hamel discovered the nest, a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) ate the eggs. Defense efforts of the adults and of an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) were ineffectual. Similar mobbing of a jay by robins and House Finches was observed on 30 May.

For the 3 weeks following destruction of the clutch, we saw House Finches singing and courting as before in the original area and at other locations within 300 m. On 14

TABLE 1. Christmas Bird Count Records of House Finches
in South Carolina, 1974-1982.

Year	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
House Finches Counted	5	0	9	1	3+ ¹	44	288	64	415

¹House Finches were listed as "count week only" in Clemson (Hamel and LeGrand 1979).

July, Wagner discovered another nest of House Finches 9 m above ground in an ornamental Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) 250 m from the first site. A bird was sitting on the nest at the time, and a male was nearby in a tree. We could not determine whether these individuals were the same as those observed earlier. By 19 July this nest had been destroyed, leaving fragments of perhaps 3 eggs on the ground.

The first nest measured 65 x 60 mm inside diameter, 130 x 115 mm outside diameter, and 40 mm deep. It was constructed primarily of Chickweed (*Stellula media*), small amounts of Crab Grass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*), and juniper, and was lined with a variety of man-made fibers, including binding twine, discarded cigarette filters, and cigarette papers. This nest (CUVC 1809) was placed in the Clemson University Vertebrate Collections. As far as we know, it is the first nest of *Carpodacus mexicanus* collected in South Carolina.

Three birds with unpneumatized skulls, two of them females, which were collected in Clemson in November 1980 and deposited in the Clemson University Vertebrate Collections (CUVC 1309, 1310, and 1311), may be the only whole specimens from South Carolina.

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