

# General Field Notes

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## Eastern Phoebe Breeds In the Northeast Upper Coastal Plain of South Carolina

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A pair of Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*) nested underneath a bridge on paved road SR-36 at Anderson's Mill Pond, 4.5 km SE of Wallace, Marlboro County, in the Upper Coastal Plain of South Carolina. On 25 June 1988, I flushed one young from the nest when I raised my head to look inside it. One adult tended this young after I flushed it while its mate remained nearby. Earlier, on 11 June, one adult visited the nest once for 20 sec and called briefly while underneath the bridge. I do not know if the female was incubating or brooding at this time. I detected no other evidence of past phoebe occupancy at this bridge.

The phoebe nest was adherent to concrete on a rough surface at the base of a narrow (15 cm) diagonal segment of the underside of the bridge which joins the floor and end wall of the bridge along its entire length. The NW facing nest was placed at the midpoint, 3.5 m from either side of the bridge. The distance from the top of the nest to the floor was 10 cm, and the distance from the bottom of the nest to water was 58 cm (very low, see McNair, 1984).

The bridge was built entirely of concrete, divided into three partitions, and contained no ledges. The bridge is oriented NE-SW, is 7.1 m wide, and spans 9.6 m. The height at the center of the bridge above water to the top of the bridge, as well as the end wall above water, is 1.6 m. No utility wires exist at this site.

Later in 1988, I found an old phoebe nest on a ledge under the eaves of the porch above the main step entrance of an abandoned house beside Anderson's Mill Pond, about 100 m from the above bridge. On 11 March 1989, I found a pair of phoebes on territory at the house. On 13 April, a new nest, with one egg, had been

built on top of an electric light socket which was placed over the top of a window jamb. The top of the nest was 50 cm below the porch roof. On 23 April, the nest contained four eggs. On 24 May, the nest was undamaged but contained several mummified young. Some grassy materials had been added to the nest cup of the original nest, evidence suggesting that the pair of phoebes possibly attempted to re-nest.

On 22 June 1989, I watched a pair of phoebes, presumably the same pair as above, bring damselflies, dragonflies, and other winged insects to nestlings at a nest underneath the same bridge used in 1988. The distance from the bottom of the nest to water was only about 30 cm, because the water was very high from recent rains. Because of the sequence of breeding events in both years, I believe the same pair of phoebes nested in both years at both nest-sites.

In 1989, two pairs of phoebes nested underneath the very large US Highway 1 bridge (outgoing to Wallace, Marlboro County), over the Great Pee Dee River on the Chesterfield County side, South Carolina, at the Fall Line. I found a total of seven nests, all of which were placed on rough broad concrete sections over moist land within the floodplain near wooded swamps, yet not directly over water. The tops of all phoebe nests were about 1.2 m below the highway floor of the bridge and far above the ground (greater than 6 m). Some of the nests were in corners of the sections adjacent to end wall partitions, while others were not. Nests faced either direction (N-S).

Five of the nests were in a group, all unoccupied, about 40 m apart from the other two nests; the two groups were separated by a creek. One adult phoebe was feeding two very recently fledged young near the group of five nests on 11 June. On the same date, one of the two-nest group was occupied and the male was bringing food to the female. The female was probably incubating then because later, on 1 July, an adult was bringing food for nestlings at this nest, while its mate remained nearby. At least three other phoebes were feeding nearby at the wooded swamps and woodland edges.

I found another pair of phoebes breeding at the Fall Line in Chesterfield County in 1989, on paved road SR-166 over Bear Creek about 8 km from Cheraw. On 14 April, the female was incubating eggs on a nest underneath a new small concrete bridge, while her mate and an unmated male were singing nearby. The bridge had a single partition which had a narrow, continuous diagonal edge on top on each side. On one side, one Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) nest in the middle of the partition had been appropriated by this nesting pair of phoebes. The top of this phoebe nest was close to the floor of the bridge. I detected no evidence that phoebes had used this site for breeding previously.

Finally, in 1989, another pair of phoebes nested underneath the large concrete bridge over Black Creek, US 15 By-Pass, Hartsville, Darlington County, South Carolina, in the Upper Coastal Plain. On 11 May, the male was bringing damselflies, dragonflies, and other winged insects to the nest, while the female was incubating or brooding.

These nest records of Eastern Phoebe at four localities within three counties of the northeast Upper Coastal Plain of South Carolina in 1988 and 1989 are the first documentation of breeding in this physiographic province of the state (Post and Gauthreaux, 1989). L. Glover found several nests of one pair of phoebes in May 1988 slightly further south, on the Fall Line at Lugoff, Kershaw County (Chat 53:48, 1989). One Eastern Phoebe was reported in the Upper Coastal Plain at Santee State Park, Orangeburg County, on 4 June 1977, but no breeding evidence was documented (Chat 42:71, 1978). In the Piedmont, confirmed breeding records closest to the Fall Line are from NW Marlboro and N Chesterfield counties (McNair, unpubl.) and 16 km N of Columbia, Richland County, where one nest was found under the eaves of a house in May 1985 (Chat 49:104, 1985).

This modest breeding range expansion of Eastern Phoebes to the Coastal Plain of South Carolina is not surprising because phoebes have expanded their breeding range throughout this physiographic province in other states in the southeast USA (McNair, 1984, and references cited therein). In 1988, Eastern Phoebes also first nested in Florida, when young fledged from a nest underneath a bridge in N Okaloosa County in early June (Ware and Duncan, 1989; nest coll., FMNH).

In the Sandhills Province of the Upper Coastal Plain of the Carolinas, I only know of phoebe nests located under bridges (pers. obsv.: J. Carter, pers. comm.). With the possible exception of phoebes breeding in the northern Coastal Plain of North Carolina, I am unaware of any phoebe building a nest in the Coastal Plain of the Carolinas under the eaves of a building except for the pair at Anderson's Mill Pond, Marlboro County, South Carolina.

Some nest-site characteristics of phoebes breeding under bridges in the northeast Upper Coastal Plain of South Carolina differ from phoebes breeding under bridges in the nearby Sandhills Province and Piedmont of North Carolina (McNair, 1984). In South Carolina, two of the four bridges were large. Most nests were adherent, not stant, and were usually placed away from the edge of the bridges. The nests at Anderson's Mill Pond were placed very close to the water and the nests of the US 1 bridge were placed high above ground. Barn Swallows also nested under all bridges used by phoebes in South Carolina. These differences may be an artifact of the characteristics of the bridges themselves, because I was unable to locate small bridges with steel I-beam ledges in the northeast Upper Coastal Plain of South Carolina, which were numerous in nearby North Carolina (McNair, 1984)).

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### Breeding ranges of *Carpodacus* finches wintering in South Carolina

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House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) and Purple Finches (*C. purpureus*) frequently visit feeders in South Carolina. Although Purple Finches are native to the eastern United States and traditionally winter in SC, House Finches were introduced to the eastern US only recently. The first record for House Finches east of the Great Plains came from Jones Beach, Long Island, New York in 1941 (Elliot and Arbib, 1953). A New York bird dealer apparently released captive House Finches after their sale (under the name of "Hollywood Finches") was banned. On the basis of historical and morphological evidence, Aldrich and Weske (1978) concluded that the eastern House Finch population descended from California stock.

Since their introduction, House Finches have spread rapidly throughout the eastern US. House Finches reached SC in the winter of 1966-67, with breeding records for the state beginning around 1975 (see Potter et al, 1980; Hamel and Wagner, 1984 for review). The first known House Finch nests in the Clemson area were found in 1983 (Hamel and Wagner, 1984). House Finches now frequently nest in trees and shrubs on the Clemson University campus and throughout residential areas of the city and represent one of our most common winter bird species.

Although both House Finches and Purple Finches are common winter residents, little is known about the origins (i.e., nesting localities) of *Carpodacus* finch