

General Field Notes

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Pine Siskin Nest on Roan Mountain, North Carolina

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On 13 July 1993 I discovered a nest of the Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) near the summit of Roan Mountain, Mitchell County, North Carolina. It was found when the incubating female called in response to the male, which was perched in an adjacent tree. The nest was in a live Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*) within a stand of dead conifers at the entrance to the Rhododendron Gardens Road, only 300 m from the Tennessee border. This is at an elevation of approximately 1875 m. The nest was placed 7.3 m above the ground in a fir about 11 m tall. It was concealed in a clump of foliage near the tip of a branch that extended to the edge of the road. The head and tail of the incubating female could be seen from the road. Attempts to examine the contents of the nest with a mirror mounted on a pole failed because of the dense foliage just above the nest. The nest appeared to be made mainly of grasses.

No siskins were encountered on a visit to the area on 18 June 1993, but one was heard calling as it flew overhead on 3 July. After the discovery of the nest, I saw the male feed the female as she sat upon the nest on 16 July. She was still incubating on 21 July. Wallace Coffey and Larry McDaniel observed an adult feeding at least two noisy young in the nest on 1 August. On 8 August there was no activity around the nest and no siskins were found elsewhere on the mountain. However, I could see considerable excrement around the rim of the nest, as in nests of American Goldfinch (*C. tristis*) from which young have fledged. Two siskins were heard on 29 August near Carver's Gap, about 3 km away.

The Pine Siskin is generally considered to be an erratic visitor or resident in the mountains along the Tennessee and North Carolina border. In a review of breeding evidence in the Southern Appalachians, McNair (1988) cites nine probable or confirmed records, mostly of fledged young, in these two states. Subsequent records are of nests in Transylvania County (Siebenheller and Siebenheller 1992) and Jackson County (Simpson 1993), North Carolina, and fledged young in Hamilton County, Tennessee (Caldwell 1991). The nest described in this note appears to be only the fourth documented nest from this region and just the second verified to contain eggs or young. All are from North Carolina. This was the third breeding record from Roan Mountain (see McNair 1988), which has more such records than any other location in the region (probably owing to more regular coverage). The date of this nesting was later than all previous records cited above, except for one instance of a siskin gathering nest material on 15-16 July 1975 on Roan Mountain (R. Lewis *vide* McNair 1988).

Most siskin breeding records in this region have been in seasons following intermediate or major winter invasions (McNair 1988), again except for the 1975 Roan Mountain record, cited above, which occurred following a "non-existent or poor flight" (*op. cit.*). The 1993 Roan Mountain record followed a poor winter flight, in which only a very few siskins were reported and virtually all of these were at low elevations around feeders. None were found on the 1992 Roan Mountain Christmas Bird Count (*pers. obs.*).

The relation of Pine Siskin breeding to cone-crop production in the Southern Appalachians is less known than that for Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) (McNair 1988). A good cone-crop, particularly of firs, was evident on Roan Mountain during the late summer of 1993. This probably was an important factor in the timing of the nesting, as siskins feed their young by regurgitation of seeds or a mix of seeds and insects (Newton 1972).

Obviously, more intensive study is needed to clarify siskin breeding status in this region. All summer observations noting behavior and cone-crop condition, should be reported.

I thank Eloise Potter and Lynn Moseley for suggestions that improved this note.

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