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House Finches in southeastern and central Pennsylvania

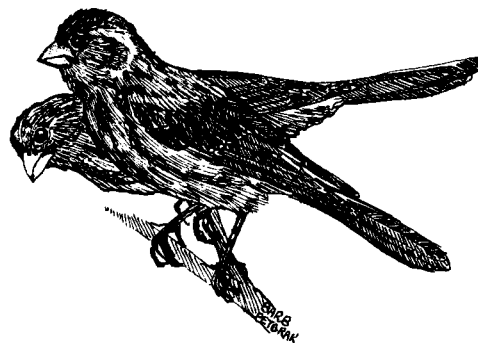
Raymond J. Middleton

The eastern population of the House Finch (*Carpodus mexicanus*) first appeared in Norristown, PA on 1 December 1955. On 22 January 1960, David A. Cutler of King of Prussia reported six, approximately 5 miles from Norristown. Two days later several traps were taken to King of Prussia and all the birds were trapped and banded. Two weeks later, House Finches were seen at my banding station in Norristown and at the feeders of Mr. and Mrs. William Pepper in the Chestnut Hill area of Philadelphia, fifteen miles from Norristown. Merrill Wood reports the first appearance at State College, near the center of Pennsylvania on 26 November 1969. There was little increase in numbers for six years at State College.

These birds were coming from the Long Island, NY population, as records in this paper will support. Prior to 1970 the birds remained in the Philadelphia area only during the winter season. During these years many House Finches banded in Pennsylvania in winter were recovered in northern New Jersey, New York (especially Long Island) and Connecticut during the summer. Birds banded in the summer locations were being recovered in Pennsylvania during the winter season.

In 1971-72 a few House Finches were present in the summer months and from 1973 to date the species was present (even common) in every month of the year. The 1978 nesting season report (Robertson, 1978. *Am. Birds* 32:6) now lists the House Finch as a breeding bird in numbers from New England south to South Carolina and westward to the Mississippi River, with one Missouri report just west of the Mississippi River. In this same issue of *American Birds* Robertson states, "the westernmost record for this eastern population is now within 600 miles of the nearest eastern record of the western population." He predicts that the two populations will meet within 5-10 years.

At the Pepper station many ground Potter traps are used in addition to mist nets when the weather permits. The Wood station uses Potter traps, an all-purpose trap, and many Chardonneret traps with water drips. The Middleton station uses one 4-celled Potter trap and a drop trap, both mounted on posts and squirrel proofed. Sunflower seed is used for bait at all three stations.



The tables and data presented are from the banding records of the Pepper station, the Middleton station, and the Wood station; returns, recoveries, and foreign retraps are from the Pepper and Middleton stations only. Wood's records have been submitted elsewhere for publication.

At the Pepper and Middleton stations birds were aged by plumage and/or time of year, but not by skulling or other methods. The low number of AHY at the Middleton station in comparison with Pepper and Wood can be explained by the fact that during the first half of 1978, when AHY and HY can be so easily determined, Middleton caught only 12% of the 1978 catch while Pepper had 53% and Wood 28%.

Table 1. Totals of House Finches banded

	Pepper	Middleton	Wood
1960	1	7	
1961	1	7	
1962	0	19	
1963	17	5	
1964	5	24	
1965	33	63	
1966	35	33	
1967	128	14	
1968	32	6	
1969	71	13	1
1970	61	32	7
1971	158	32	0
1972	240	80	1
1973	438	121	0
1974	388	170	11
1975	567	66	45
1976	1283	376	206
1977	1456	404	315
1978	1549	954	832
Total	6463	2471	1418

Table 2. Monthly banding in 1978

	Pepper	Middleton	Wood
January	71	18	7
February	14	9	0
March	23	0	0
April	221	26	23
May	226	20	15
June	274	51	189
July	277	90	179
August	258	197	143
September	105	112	90
October	44	51	83
November	15	172	97
December	20	208	6

Table 3. Age division in 1978

	Pepper	Middleton	Wood
AHY	717	142	228
HY	322	514	453
U	510	298	151

Table 4. Returns to banding site

	Pepper	Middleton
Returned next year	258	86
Returned both summer & winter	80	27
Returned 2 successive years	83	8
Returned 2nd year only	54	12
Returned 3rd year	19	6
Returned 4th year	9	6
Returned 5th year	6	1*
Returned 6th year	2**	

* Only returned in the 5th year.

** One bird was an AHY when banded 6 years prior to retrap; thus the bird was at least 7 years old. Both birds returned in 3 other years, also.

Table 5. Recoveries of House Finches banded by Pepper (distances are approximate)

PA:	14 at nearby stations (within 8 km) 1 at Bethlehem by Mutchler (80 km) 2 at Norristown by Middleton (25 km)
DEL:	1 at Bellville; 1 at Bridgeville (95 & 110km)
MD:	5: 1 banded 16 Feb. Taken 1 May same year (reverse migration)
NJ:	2 at Ridgewood by Elinor McEntee Clark (190 km) 1 at Englewood Cliffs by Van Gelder (190 km)
NY:	1 each at Manhasset, Bluepoint, and Mineola (all winter-banded and taken the following spring) (165 km each) 2 at Rockville Center, 2 at Atlantic Beach by Cohen (190 km) (Ed. note: These are all Long Island stations)
CONN:	1 each at Fairfield & Westport (190 km); 1 at Ridgefield (215 km); 2 at Bridgeport (200 km)

Table 6. Recoveries made by Pepper (distances are approximate)

PA:	26 banded at nearby stations 2 banded at Norristown (25 km) 1 banded at Bethlehem (120 km) 5 banded at Washington's Crossing (65 km)
NJ:	2 banded at Ridgewood (210 km) 1 banded at Hopewell (135 km) 1 banded at Mt. Holly (65 km)
NY:	5 banded at Atlantic Beach (215 km) 2 banded at Manhasset (190 km)
CONN:	1 banded at Fairfield (215 km)
WASH, DC:	3 banded (245 km)
VA:	2 banded at Hampton (645 km) 1 banded at Richmond* (645 km)
NC:	1 banded at Greensboro (960 km)
MD:	1 banded at Dornestown ** (225 km)

* Banded 25 Jan 1970. Taken 27 Dec 1970, 11 Dec 1971, 20 Nov 1972.

** Banded 6 Jan 1974. Taken 20 July 1975, 4 June 1976.

Table 7. Recoveries of House Finches banded by Middleton (distances are approximate)

PA:	3 at Chestnut Hill (25 km) 1 at West Chester (32 km)
DEL:	1 at Hackessin (55 km)
NJ:	3 at Ridgewood (190 km) 1 at Lincroft (160 km) 1 at Matewan (145 km) 1 at Whiting (110 km)
NY:	1 at Brooklyn (160 km)
CONN:	1 at Riverside (175 km)

Table 8. Recoveries made by Middleton (distances are approximate)

PA:	2 banded at Huntington Valley (29 km) 3 banded at King of Prussia (8 km)
MD:	2 banded at Chevy Chase* (240 km) 1 banded at Bowie** (190 km)
NJ:	2 banded at Ridgewood (190 km)
NY:	1 banded at Atlantic Beach (190 km) 2 banded at Mamoroneck (175 km)
CONN:	1 banded at Greenwich (190 km)

** Banded 2 Feb 1975. Taken 28 Mar 1975 & 13 Jul 1976.

* Banded 30 Nov 1974. Taken 25 Nov 1975 & 5 May 1976.

It is always interesting to trap another bander's birds and to have one's birds retrapped by others. The Peppers have had this interchange with three other stations — Clark, Cohen, and Dunning. The Middleton station has had interchange only with the Clark station.

Population changes

The Peppers report that there seems to be little change in the numbers of other species as the House Finch numbers increased during the recent years.

At Norristown the only species decrease has been

the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The migratory species have been decreasing in numbers since the mid-1950's, and the severe winters of the last two years apparently have resulted in a drop in the numbers of wintering birds in this area. During the winter of 1978 there was an invasion of Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) and Common Redpoll (*Acanthus flammea*). At this time the House Finch population was low in numbers. Also, during the same period in 1978, the number of ground feeding species was at a very low ebb. ☞

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(This paper was presented at the EBBA Annual Meeting 1979.)

A Band-tailed Pigeon recovery in Florida

While reviewing computer printouts of all birds banded or recovered in Florida, I discovered the record of a Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*). Subsequent investigation of records from the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL), Laurel, Maryland, revealed that it was banded in northwest Oregon (lat. 45°20' long. 122°40') on 15 May 1966. It was shot near Bonifay, Holmes County, Florida, in December 1967 by a hunter who mailed the band (#066528422) to the BBL with an accompanying letter.

The evidence accumulated indicates that this was a wild bird and the species should be added to the state list. The following information supports the validity of the record. 1. The bander, James Cromwell, employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, banded at least 2363 Band-tailed Pigeons during the years 1965-1968 (Otis Swisher, President, Western Bird Banding Association, pers. comm.). The bird in question was an adult male at the time of banding. 2. The hunter who shot the bird wrote that it was a 'pigeon,' and included the actual band in his letter to the BBL. The band is in excellent condition with the numbers clearly legible even on a xerox copy. 3. A letter from the Director, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, states "Oregon has not traded any Band-tailed Pigeons to any other state," and a letter from the Chief, Bureau of Wildlife Resources, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, states that "there has been no attempt to introduce Band-tailed Pigeons into Florida." 4. There are occurrences of this species in other southeastern states. Imhof (1976, Alabama birds, 2nd ed., University, Ala., Univ. Ala. Press) places the bird on Alabama's hypothetical list because the sole record, based on one lengthy observation, lacks a

photograph or specimen. Lowery (1974, Louisiana birds, 3rd rev. ed., Baton Rouge, La., La State Univ. Press) states that "at least five have been recorded in the state." Four of these were specimens.

The status of the Band-tailed Pigeon in Florida rests on two occurrences. There is a record and photograph of two at Sarasota (Letson 1968, Fla. Nat. 41:126). However, Stevenson (1976, Vertebrates of Florida, Gainesville, Univ. Presses Fla.) considered these "more likely to have escaped from captivity than to have wandered so far from their usual range." Except for one outer rectrix on one of the Sarasota birds, the tail feathers were not ragged as is often the case with captive birds. The second reference (Edscorn 1974, Fla. Nat. 47:31) cites no details other than one reported from Sugarloaf Key.

The hunter who shot the Bonifay pigeon did so "about a week before Christmas (1967)" within the same week the Sarasota birds were first seen (17 December 1967). This recovery along with the photographed Sarasota birds should be sufficient evidence to establish the Band-tailed Pigeon on the Florida State list.

I thank Otis Swisher, Hal A. Beecher, Harry Nehls, Henry M. Stevenson and Lovett E. Williams for information I received, and Robert A. Duncan for comments on this note. Copies of letters mentioned above and a xerox of the band have been deposited with the Florida Ornithological Society Archives at the Florida State Museum, Gainesville. — Lucy R. Duncan, 614 Fairpoint Drive, Gulf Breeze, Florida 32561. ☞

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