# The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

## Finches

Richard A. Rowe

Department of Biology
Virginia Military Institute

**Accidental** – A bird outside of its normal range (breeding or winter) or outside of its normal migration route
**Rare** – A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range or its normal migration route, but should not be expected to be seen in the area on a yearly basis
**Unusual –** A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range but is not reported on a regular basis in the county (1-5 sightings per year)
**Common** – A bird that is regularly seen within the area but may not be present in large numbers or may have a restricted distribution (Locally Common)
**Abundant** – A bird that is found in large numbers within the county but may have a restricted distribution (Locally Abundant)

**Transient** – A bird that is seen in the area during migration or as a wandering sub-adult
**Year-round** – A bird that is present in the area throughout the entire year and is usually a breeder
**Summer breeder** – A bird that migrates into the area and breeds during the summer
**Winter migrant/resident** – A bird that migrates into the area and over-winters and then leaves in the spring

**Locations**

BB = Brownsburg and Bustleburg area including Route 252
BQ = Barger's Quarry
BRP 1 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 28 and 45 (Route 56 and Route 60)
BRP 2 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 45 and 64 (Route 60 and the James River)
BRP AO = Blue Ridge Parkway and Apple Orchard Mountain (mileposts 76 to 78)
BS = Big Spring
CT = Chessie Trail
GP = Goshen Pass
KD = Kendal Retirement community
LEX = Lexington
LM = Lake Merriweather at Goshen Pass
LR = Lake Robertson
LT = Locher Tract
MF = McCormick's Farm
MR = Maury River
NM = North Mountain
OFRP = Old Farm Road Pond
PQ = Quarry at the Ponds
RB = Rockbridge Baths area
RC = Rockbridge County in general
SR = South River
WL = Willow Lake

Notes:
Cameron's Pond, which was located near the current Rockbridge County High School, drained naturally in 19??.

Womeldorf Farm ponds are located just outside of Lexington in the new, Pond's housing development.
Lake Robertson and Lake Merriweather were created after Murray published his account of the Birds of Rockbridge County.

# Passeriformes: Fringillidae

Finches

(All photos: Finches and House Sparrows )

## Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*):

**Occurrence:** Winter resident and migrant through the area

**Dates:** Mid October through late April

**Location:** RC

**History:** Purple Finches are seen most winters but their numbers vary dramatically from year to year. They can be uncommon in some years and abundant in others. The earliest arrival date is 9 October 2010 and the latest departure date is 21 April 2009. During the winter of 2003-04 Purple Finches were abundant in the area. We had 20 – 25 individuals at our feeders for most of the winter. George Tolley reported 200+ individuals at his feeders during the 2003-04 winter. Purple Finches have been reported on 68 of 84 CBC with an average of 48 individuals reported each year. Murray reports an occurrence range of 10 October 1957 through 5 May.

**Status:** Common to sporadically abundant winter resident and should be seen in the area

**Photo:** Lexington; left photo, male; right photo, female; both photos, 19 December 2008.

For additional photos: Purple Finch

## House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*):

**Occurrence:** Year-round resident/breeder

**Dates:** Year-round

**Location:** RC

**History:** House Finches have become a common, permanent resident of the area. They can be found throughout most of the areas in the county and at all elevations. House Finches are a western species that was introduced in 1940 in Long Island. Since that time, they have spread throughout most of the eastern United States. Data from the CBC suggest that House Finches arrived in Lexington in 1974, and they have been continuously reported since 1977. The average number of individuals reported each year is 61, and the highest count total is 472 individuals reported in 1986.

**Status:** Abundant year-round resident and should be seen in the area.
**Photo:** Lexington: left (male) 23 January 2011, right (female) 20 March 2008.
For additional photos: House Finch

## **Red Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*)

**Occurrence:** Transient during the winter
**Dates:** Late December and early January
**Locations:** BRP 1, LR
**History:** There are three, recent reports of Red Crossbills in the area. A single individual was located in Fairfield by Barry Kinzie and Kent Davis on 18 November 2012. A group of eight individuals was seen at Lake Robertson on the 2007 CBC (26 December 2007). A group of five individuals was seen along the Blue Ridge Parkway near mile post 44 on 3 January 2005. Murray reports three records, two of which were in April, 1941, and May, 1955, and no dates were given for the third record.
**Status:** Rare winter species and not expected to be seen.

## **White-winged Crossbill** (*Loxia leucoptera*)

**Occurrence:** Rare winter resident
**Date:** 17 November 2012
**Location:** Natural Bridge
**History:** Wes Teets located a single White-winged Crossbill in the parking lot at the Natural Bridge Visitor's Center. White-winged Crossbills were reported in small numbers throughout the State in November of 2012. A number of different northern finch species were reported in November of 2012 with large numbers of Pine Siskins being reported.
**Status:** Single record and not expected in the area.

## **Common Redpoll** (*Acanthis flammea*)

**Occurrence:** Accidental
**Dates:** 29 January 1978, 19 February 1978
**Location:** LEX
**History:** Redpolls were seen at two, different feeders in Lexington during the winter of 1978. There was an explosion of Redpolls into Virginia that year.
**Status:** Accidental and not expected.

## **Pine Siskin** (*Carduelis pinus*):

**Occurrence:** Winter resident and migrant into the area
**Dates:** October through February
**Locations:** RC
**History:** Pine Siskins are a winter resident or migrant into the area. Their numbers vary greatly from year to year, but they rarely are present in large numbers. Recent records are on 29 December 2004 in Lexington, 5 February 2004 in the Kerrs Creek area (Coalter), 19 December 2008 in Lexington, 7 February 2009, and 24 December 2010 in Lexington. Siskins have been reported on 17 of 84 CBC. They have been reported on four of the last ten counts, but in 2008 Siskins were common in the area and 88 individuals were reported. Murray reports that Siskins are a scarce winter visitor with flocks reported on 2 November 1919, 10 December 1933, 22 January 1947 and 11 April 1949.
**Status:** Uncommon winter migrant/resident and not expected.
**Photo:** Lexington, 24 October 2012.
For additional photos: Pine Siskin

## **American Goldfinch** (*Carduelis tristis*):

**Occurrence:** Year-round resident/breeder
**Dates:** Year-round
**Location:** RC
**History:** Goldfinches are a permanent resident of the area. They are found in flocks until late spring. Goldfinches have been reported on 76 of 84 CBC with an average of 68 individuals seen each year. The highest count total is 297 individuals reported in 2008. Murray reports nests with eggs by 18 July.
**Status:** Abundant year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
**Photo:** left photo, Lexington, male in breeding plumage, 2 June 2010; right photo, McCormick's Farm, winter coloration, 6 November 2010.
For additional photos: American Goldfinch

## **Evening Grosbeak** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)

**Occurrence:** Winter migrant/resident
**Dates:** November through April
**Where to find it:** Murray reports flocks of varying sizes that remained in the area during the winters of 1943-44, 1945-46, 1950, 1951-52, 1954-55, and 1956. Evening Grosbeaks are normally found farther north during the winter and their movement into our area is sporadic. They have been reported on 26 CBC's, but the last sighting was in 1993. Between 1968 and 1987, Evening Grosbeaks were reported almost every year with a high count total of 246 in 1975.
**Status:** Rare winter resident/migrant and not expected to be seen in the area.

# Passeriformes:Passeridae

House Sparrow

## **House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*):

**Occurrence:** Year-round resident/breeder
**Dates:** Year-round
**Location:** RC
**History:** House Sparrows are a permanent resident of the area. They have been reported on 76 of 84 CBC with an average of 98 birds reported each year. Murray reports nesting as early as 1 February 1943 with eggs present on 7 April.
**Status:** Abundant year-round resident and should be seen in the area.
**Photo:** Lexington, 20 April 2006.
For additional photos: House Sparrow