



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 17, 2022



Photo by Jennifer Brent



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House Finches

Each year CWC receives over 300 House Finches—a tiny songbird whose voices you’ve indubitably heard. Many of these finches are orphaned and our Orphan Care Unit may have up to 100 of these birds at a time. The other most frequent reason House Finches are brought in for care is after being caught by a cat, which generally means death for these birds who weigh only 21 grams (the same as five sugar packets or 18 jelly beans).

House Finches are just one of a number of finches found in our area of Southern California. The other most common finches are American Goldfinches (small yellow birds) and Lesser Goldfinches (even tinier birds, this species weighs an average of 10 grams, the same as two nickels). Finches are very social birds and they gather in large groups up to a hundred or more, which makes them extremely susceptible to infectious diseases. You may see groups of House Finches and Goldfinches in your yard, clustered around trees with berries or seeds, their main food source. They will quickly dart to the ground to pick up grains or aphids and if you have a feeder. Nyjer and sunflower seeds will draw a crowd of these little birds.

In 1940, New York pet shops were breeding House Finches illegally and released the “Hollywood Finches” in order to evade prosecution. Though native to the Southwest, these birds can now be found abundantly along the East coast. In 1994, however, House Finches were seen with swollen and crusty eyes, a sign of mycoplasma, a bird conjunctivitis. The disease spread quickly and in just a few years, half of the House Finches in eastern North America had died.

In order to protect the finches that feed in your yard, be sure to clean your bird bath and feeder regularly (frequency depends on usage and should be done a minimum of once a week) with a solution of 10:1 bleach and to rake thoroughly under your feeder.

Finches lay 2-6 eggs at a time and right now, the young are being hatched in Los Angeles. Careful walkers may find their small bluish eggs with black spots on the ground as they are discarded by the newly hatched chicks. Finches are flighted and mature enough to leave the nest at an average of 15 days from hatching.

Although native birds are protected by state and federal law and cannot be kept as pets, other types of non-native finches continue to be common in the pet trade, with the more colorful species as the most popular. There are even finch singing competitions where the winner is determined by who can chirp 50 times the most quickly, and in 2019 a man was busted at JFK Airport smuggling exotic finches from Guyana. Winning birds may sell for as much as \$10,000.