



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

June 20, 2025

Fine-Feathered Finches

The House Finch is one of the most prolific species we treat at CWC. So far this year, we've admitted 250 of these small birds. We see finches come in for a variety of reasons, some of the most frequent include being caught by cats or dogs, injuries from tree trimming, contagious illnesses, and being found orphaned.

The House Finch is a small bird that is fairly common to spot in open spaces like backyards and parks. Female finches are more monochrome in color, with shades of brown throughout, while males have plumage that ranges from yellow to bright red depending on the food available in their region. In fact, the color of the male plumage depends on their diets and the amount of carotenoid-rich foods they eat (red, orange and yellow pigments present in foods like tomatoes, pumpkins and carrots).

House Finches were originally a West Coast species. However, in the 1940s, a Long Island pet store illegally kept and eventually released a group of House Finches, trying to avoid any legal repercussions. The released birds survived and helped spread their population to other parts of the country. House Finches can even be found in Hawaii! Today, they are common across much of the United States.

While in our NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit), House Finches, depending on their age, start on a formula-based diet. Interestingly, they're one of the few patients who will overeat if given the opportunity, and will often continue to beg for food even after they have been fed. Because of this, staff need to keep an extra close eye on their feeding schedules to ensure they aren't overeating.

Once finches are developmentally ready for a more solid diet, staff begin offering food in their enclosures to help them learn to eat on their own. They're given a variety of small seeds, greens, and fruit to explore and practice eating. Hanging millet is also provided to encourage natural foraging behaviors and help them master eating while perched. Young House Finches are weaned off formula once they can consume enough calories for healthy development without human intervention. In the wild, their diet is a vegetarian one, consisting of nuts, berries and seeds.



Nestling House Finches gaping.



Juvenile House Finch acclimating to the outdoors and strengthening flight muscles.