

SPOTLIGHT

HOUSE FINCH



House finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) eating a sunflower seed at our feeder in May.

Native to southwestern United States, house finches proliferated in the East after a pet store released caged individuals in New York City in 1939. The birds appeared for the first time in Philadelphia in the late 1950's, when they behaved as winter migrants. Populations here later expanded to include year-round residents.¹

After their release in New York City, house finches evolved changes in structure, physiology, and coloration. Presumably, evolution combined with bird feeding contributed to the house finch's success in adapting to new conditions.²

Despite their abundance, house finch populations in Pennsylvania in the last two decades declined by over half.³ Lethal bacterial conjunctivitis spread to house finches congregating at bird feeders,⁴ but other forces may have taken a toll, as discussed in the case of house sparrows in Chapter 3.