

# Outdoor Recreation *is* Outdoor Education

Have you seen a small, mostly brown bird in your yard, chirping away? You might have been watching house finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*).

While very common, house finches have some very interesting traits.

They're gregarious, meaning they like to be in large groups. More eyes watching for danger helps the entire group, so you will often see many house finches together at a bird feeder. They also nest close together, with a relatively small space being home to many pairs of birds.



They are a small bird with a notch in the end of their tail and they have brown streaks on their chests. House finches are sexually dimorphic (the males and females look different) with the adult males gaining a red wash to their heads and chests. This color comes from their food, and in some populations, the males might have a yellow wash to their feathers because of a dietary difference.

The red color in males is favored by the females, and has even been linked to physical health. Some studies have found that the redder a male house finch is, the fewer parasites it has. You can see why that would be important to the females and their future young.

House finches usually nest in cavities - holes in trees - but have adapted well to urban environments and commonly nest in building crevices or palm trees. Nest parasites can limit the survival of their young and affect males chicks more than females. The adult female house finch will often combat this by laying female eggs first, reducing the amount of time male chicks are exposed to parasites.

So the next time you see this little, common bird, remember how fascinating our wildlife can be.



House Finch



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

[www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us)

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