

HISTORY & FACTS of the FEBRUARY CENSUS

| February | 12-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|------------|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|
| 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| 43 / 1,244 | 41 / 1,183 | 40 / 744 | 39 / 658 | 45 / 1,863 | 42 / 1,342 | 41 / 734 | 44 / 1,092 | 41 / 1,383 |
| 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | | | | | | |
| 44 / 2,451 | 39 / 1,017 | 47 / 2,591 | | | | | | |

Most Species seen in February : 47 on 02/01/2021.

Most Individual Birds seen in February : 2,591 on 02/01/2021.

Fewest Species seen in February : 39 on 02/01/2013 & 02/01/2020.

Fewest Individual Birds seen in February : 658 on 02/01/2013.

Species Average in February : 42.2 Species.

Total Individuals Average in February : 1,358.5 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on February Census : 9-degrees F on 02/01/2019.

Highest Temperature on February Census : 47-degrees F on 02/01/2014.

Longest Time Afield on February Census : 9 hours & 50 minutes on 02/01/2019.

Shortest Time Afield on February Census : 6 hours & 20 minutes on 02/04/2012.

LAST FEBRUARY'S FIELD REPORT

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 02/01/20 | TOTAL SPECIES: | 39 | START / END TIME: | 7:30am - 4:30pm | |
| | TOTAL BIRDS: | 1,017 | TIME AFIELD: | 9:00 | |
| OBSERVERS: | John Henry & Douglas W. Vogus | | | TEMP.: | 30F ~ 35F ~ 34F |
| CONDITIONS: | Cold and gray; spitting light snow from 2:30pm on - no accumulation. Brandywine Pond and Dover Pond both frozen. Ira Beaver Marsh had the usual open patch of water along the northern edge of the marsh towards the beaver lodge. | | | | |
| TRAIL CONDITIONS: | Frozen early, softening as temperatures rose above freezing. Many more trees taken down along both the front and the back of the Akron Compost Facility, as well as across the river at the Akron Water Pollution Control Station. Unfortunately, some of the larger sycamore trees were taken down as well, at the start of the sewer trunk line. Not sure what this aggressive tree-cutting has to do with their operations. Sad this can't be worked around. | | | | |
| RIVER CONDITIONS: | Swift and slightly above normal. | | | | |

TEN YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On 02/07/2011 we set a census high with 6 Purple Finches on the monthly hike. These northern visitors are always a welcome sight and can appear at any time, though most commonly between the late fall and early spring months.

Two of the best places to find these northern finches are at the Tree Farm Trail off of Major Rd. or the Oak Hill Area off of Oak Hill Rd., both on the western rim of the Cuyahoga Valley. Finding them down along Cuyahoga River bottomlands is never a guarantee.

FEBRUARY 2021's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

PURPLE FINCH (*Haemorhous purpureus*)

DESCRIPTION:

This migratory rose red (not purple) finch is fairly common throughout much of the Northeast, Canadian provinces, and much of the Pacific coast. Generally found in less disturbed habitats than the similar House Finch. A rather chunky finch with a shortish, strongly notched tail. **MALE**: Body mostly rose red, brightest on the head and rump. Back is brownish with noticeable streaks and pinkish ground color. Head rather bright, with distinct paler pink eyebrow contrasting with darker cheek. Two distinct pinkish wing bars on each wing. Lower belly whitish with varying amounts of wide blurry streaks. Undertail coverts clean white. Bill rather large and conical. **FEMALE**: Underparts whitish with heavy dark brown streaking that does not extend to the white undertail coverts. Head boldly patterned with whitish eyebrow and submoustachial stripe that contrast with a dark brown cheek and malar stripe. Crown and back have pale streaks.

LENGTH:

5 & 1/2" - 6 & 1/4"

WINGSPREAD:

10 & 1/2"

VOICE:

CALL: A musical "chur-lee", and a sharp "pit" given in flight. **SONG**: A rich and fluid warbling, rising and falling.

HABITS:

Mostly a seed-eater, winter and spring; eats seeds of weeds, grasses, elm, red maple, white ash, sycamore, sweet gum, cedar berries, winterberry, buds of apple, aspen, maple, and birch; late spring eats beetles, green caterpillars; in summer blackberries, raspberries, and other wild and cultivated fruit; in fall eats seeds of tulip poplar, comes to feeding stations for millet, hemp, sunflower seeds. An erratic migrant southward, like redpolls, crossbills, and siskins, at times in great numbers when seed crops of spruces and, pines, and other conifers fail.

HABITAT:

BREEDING: Inhabits open coniferous forests and mixed woodlands in the East and North, and montane coniferous forest and oak canyons in the West. **WINTER**: Eastern birds migrate south to lower latitudes, sometimes irrupting with major invasions south to the southern U.S. Western birds move to lower elevations. Rare throughout much of the interior West.

NESTING:

NEST: In eastern North America, prefers spruces, firs, pines, cedars, 6 to 50ft. above ground, in dense foliage, saddled on a branch; in California in both deciduous and coniferous trees, near water, in tall willows, alders, ivy-covered trees, and in mountains 3,000-5,000 ft. in elevation, in ponderosa pines, oaks, redwoods; in Washington in Douglas firs. Nest is built of fine twigs, grasses, mosses, bits of dried snakeskin, string, lined with horsehair or wool.

EGGS: April - July, 3 to 6 eggs, usually 4 to 5, pale green-blue, speckled with blacks and browns.

INCUBATION: By female, about 13 days; young leave nest when about 14 days old. Usually two broods in California but only one in eastern North America.

RANGE:

NESTS: From northern British Columbia across Canada to Newfoundland, south through Washington, Oregon, through California in mountains to northern Baja California, and south from Canada to northeast Ohio into the Appalachians. **WINTERS**: In West from southwest British Columbia, south to central Baja California and in East from southern Canada to southeast Texas, to the Gulf States, and along the Atlantic coast.

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Purple Finch in Northeast Ohio.



- CCCCCCC = Common to Abundant. Frequently encountered in this region during this time of year.
- UUUUUUUU = Uncommon. Occurs regularly during this time of year but not frequently detected.
- RRRRRRRRR = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- OOOOOOOO = Occasional. Limited history in this region and are not to be expected.
- ***** = Accidental. Few records in the past 60 years. Not expected in this region during this time of year.
- ||||| = Fluctuating Abundance. May occur some years yet absent other years. Irruptive or overwintering birds.

History of the Purple Finch on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 - present.

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| JAN. | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| FEB. | | 6* | | | | | | |
| MAR. | 2 | | | | | | | |
| APR. | | | | | | | | |
| MAY | | | | | | | | |
| JUN. | | | | | | | | |
| JUL. | | | | | | | | |
| AUG. | | | | | | | | |
| SEP. | 1 | | 2 | | | | | |
| OCT. | 1 | | 1 | | | | | |
| NOV. | | 1 | | | 2 | | | |
| DEC. | | | | | | | | |

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| JAN. | | | | |
| FEB. | | | | |
| MAR. | | | | |
| APR. | | | | |
| MAY | | | | |
| JUN. | | | | |
| JUL. | | | | |
| AUG. | | | | |
| SEP. | | | | |
| OCT. | | | | |
| NOV. | | | | |
| DEC. | | | 5 | |

STATUS: Fairly common, but can be very habitat-specific.

DID YOU KNOW?: Since the 1980's, Purple Finches have faced increased competition from introduced House Finches for breeding sites and winter food supplies? House Finches are more aggressive and have displaced Purple Finches from many bird feeders during the winter months, forcing them to feed on tree and weed seeds found in natural habitats.

- 6*** = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.
- BOLD #** = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.



Easily confused with the introduced and more common House Finch, the Purple Finch is always a welcome sight.

(photo courtesy of The Blue Ridge Discovery Center)

FEBRUARY'S DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?: Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) was born in Paisley, Scotland and emigrated to America after troubles in his homeland? On July 14, 1794, he landed in Newcastle, Delaware almost penniless. With a companion they walked 35 miles to Philadelphia and on the way he saw a Red-headed Woodpecker, which he thought the most beautiful bird in the world. This planted the seed of what was to become his life's work, obsession, and unfulfilled purpose.

DID YOU KNOW?: According to ornithologist Elliott Coues (pronounced COWZ - 1842-1899), Wilson had genius, and was a pioneer American ornithologist (he became a citizen on June 09, 1804), who because of his accuracy as an observer, patience, hard work, and thoroughness in learning the living bird in its environment, became known as the "Father of American Ornithology."

DID YOU KNOW?: At Philadelphia, he saw through to publication the first seven volumes of his "American Ornithology" (1808-1813) before he died in his 47th. year. The eighth and ninth volumes were completed in 1814 by his friend, editor, and biographer, George Ord.

DID YOU KNOW?: According to ornithologist Arthur A. Allen, Wilson painted or drew 320 figures of American birds representing 262 species which he had observed on his travels by boat, horseback, and afoot in eastern North America - perhaps the very first "Life List" ever assembled! Encouraged in his drawing by the naturalist William Bartram, his sympathetic adviser, teacher, and friend, Wilson by 1806 had his purpose clearly fixed, to produce his fully illustrated "American Ornithology."

DID YOU KNOW?: Wilson's work was overshadowed by John James Audubon's, but his name is commemorated in: Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Wilson's Phalarope, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Plover, Wilson's Warbler, as well as the genus name of several North American wood warblers.

DID YOU KNOW?:

Before his death of dysentery, exhaustion, and fatigue (much of this brought on by his tireless work ethic), at the age of 47, Wilson had completed seven volumes of "American Ornithology", most of volume eight, and the drawings for the ninth volume. He had painted and described 264 species. He added 48 new species to those previously known to exist in the United States, prepared good life histories for 94 species, and maintained a standard so exacting that in a century and a half only a score of minor errors have been found in his works. Francis Herrick, the biographer of Audubon, wrote, "When we consider that Wilson's entire working period on "American Ornithology" was not over ten years... the achievement of this man is little short of marvelous" - an accurate appraisal, except that the period was nearer five years than ten!

DID YOU KNOW?:

During the economic stress of the War of 1812, Wilson's colorists left him, Philadelphia publisher Samuel Bradford's interest in the "American Ornithology" volumes ebbed, and Wilson, forced to color many of the plates himself, also acted as collector of the money due from subscribers. His social life had long ceased to exist (although he was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society in 1813) apart from his friendship with the family of Jacob Miller, a wealthy landowner he had known since his schoolteaching days in Milestown, Delaware. The only intimate relation during days of unceasing but often inspired work was with Sarah Miller, the daughter of the family, fifteen years younger than Wilson, to whom he was reportedly engaged and to whom he left everything he owned, including the rights to all of "American Ornithology", which consumed him.

DID YOU KNOW?:

The Wilson Ornithological Society is a non-profit membership organization founded in 1888 as the Wilson Ornithological Club, later Society, and named for Alexander Wilson, pioneer American ornithologist? The main purpose of the society is the advancement of scientific study of birds and their habits, and the publication of articles, notes, reviews, etc., in its official journal, "The Wilson Bulletin."

The society, which still meets annually, was organized originally as a chapter of the Agassiz Association but became an independent group in 1902. Its first official publication was a small magazine called "The Curlew", published in 1888 and 1889. After several changes in title during the next nine years, it became "The Wilson Bulletin" - as it is known today.

DID YOU KNOW?:

Now, what were those troubles Wilson was facing back in Scotland, you ask? Wilson's mother died when he was ten and his father, who operated illegal stills and hired weavers to work smuggled silk, remarried almost immediately. Wilson, the only son, was a weaver himself, and after painful struggles with finances and his own self-distrust, published a volume of poetry in 1790. "Watty and Meg", a popular favorite for generations, was attributed to Scottish poet Robert Burns, a fair indication of its hold on the public, but was actually Wilson. "Watty and Meg" was published anonymously, Wilson being in prison at the time. He was jailed during an obscure dispute, in a period of great social stress, with William Sharp, a wealthy Paisley mill owner. Wilson published a poem "The Shark" accusing Sharp of stealthily lengthening the measuring devices by which his employees were paid, all weaving then by piecework. Shortly before the poem appeared, Sharp received an anonymous letter containing an offer to suppress the poem for a payment of five guinea, which made the charge against Wilson not libel, but blackmail. Wilson was arrested, roughly handled, convicted, ordered to beg the pardon of God and Mr. Sharp, to burn the poem in public square and to pay fines and damages amounting to 60 pounds sterling - more than a weaver's annual earnings. These were reduced on appeal, but Wilson was in and out of court and jail for two years. Wilson was utterly disheartened when he sailed for America in May 1794, telling Thomas Crichton, "I must get out of my mind."

See You on the Trail! ~ Doug



Arrived in America almost broke and died destitute - Alexander Wilson proved that birding's rewards are not monetary.

(portrait by: Thomas Sully, courtesy of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia)

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