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Cover Page Footnote

Weather data was access from www.accuweather.com/en/us/little-rock-ar/72201/month/326862?monyr=12/01/2017. Joe Neal and Kevin McGraw made useful suggestions on an earlier draft.

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) Nesting in December in Arkansas

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Running title: House Finch nesting in December

The House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) is native to the southwestern United States and Mexico, but was introduced to the northeastern United States around 1940 (Elliot and Arbib 1953). Over the course of the next few decades, the House Finch expanded its range southward and westward in eastern United States, arriving in eastern Arkansas in 1971, with evidence of breeding there in 1985 (James and Neal 1986). By 1991, finches were breeding in the northwestern corner of the state (Arkansas Audubon Society 2015). Today it is found throughout the state and is one of the most common birds in urban and suburban areas.

Given that House Finches now occur throughout the United States, there is a great variation in the timing of nesting from early February to April (Badyaev *et al.* 2012). Here I document a nesting attempt by a pair of finches in December of 2017 in central Arkansas.

On 28 November 2017, Anthony Woods put up a wreath at his house in Maumelle (Pulaski County), Arkansas. On or about 12 December, he noticed a pair of House Finches investigating the wreath and when he took down the wreath on 29 December, he discovered a nest with 4 eggs (Figure 1). Wreaths are commonly used as nesting sites in Arkansas (*pers. observ.*)

Pair bonds persist from one breeding season to the next in some House Finch pairs and paired birds do nest earlier than newly paired birds (McGraw and Hill 2004). However, photoperiod is thought to play a role in male breeding activity (Hamner 1966), so finding a nest in December is certainly surprising. There were some warm days early in December in nearby Little Rock, with it reaching 22 °C on 11 December. Temperatures were near normal after that until 23 December when it became much colder.

Two other winter nesting attempts of House Finches have been reported in California: nests with eggs in late November (Smith 1930) and in late December (Howell and Burns 1955). There is also one report of a female starting to build a nest in November in southern Florida (Johnson 2010).

The House Finch joins the Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*) as the only unusual December breeders in

Arkansas (Smith *et al.* 1999). Koenig and Stahl (2007) suggested that fall breeding might be more common than originally thought. Possibly winter breeding will become more common as well, particularly at southern latitudes, as the climate continues to change.



Figure 1. Typical House Finch nest with 4 eggs discovered on 29 December 2017 in Maumelle, Arkansas. Photograph by Anthony Woods.

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