



Rosy-Finch Project



Winter 22-23

Rosy-Finch Feeder Counts

A Community
Science Guide

SAGELAND
COLLABORATIVE

TRACY  AVIARY

Resources & Checklist

This guide and other helpful resources can be found at:

sagelandcollaborative.org/rosy-finch

Have Questions or Need Help?

Email: rosyfinchstudy@gmail.com

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**Watch Online Training
and Reference This Guide**



Select Feeder Site



Schedule Feeder Counts



Count Birds



Look for Bands



Record and Submit Data



Acknowledgements

Development of the Rosy-finch Project would not have been possible without our many partners, sponsors, donors, and volunteers like you! This Project is funded and supported largely through the Tracy Aviary Conservation Fund and Sageland Collaborative. Photo credits Janice Gardner unless otherwise noted.

The Rosy-Finches

Black, Gray-crowned, and Brown-capped Rosy-finches remain some of the least understood birds in North America. Rosy-finches depend on alpine habitats to nest and raise their young. We suspect rosy-finches may be negatively impacted by the warming climate in our mountains.

Learning about rosy-finches in the summer is extremely difficult because their nest are placed high on cliffs and in remote areas.

However, in the winter, flocks of rosy-finches visit bird feeders, which provide accessible study sites. Thus, the Rosy-finch Feeder Counts Project was born.

We are grateful you are participating!



Goals

1

Recruit a network of dedicated volunteers to support rosy-finch conservation.

2

Obtain counts of rosy-finches across the region to understand winter distribution.

3

Collect records of banded rosy-finches to understand survival and movement.

Meet the Rosy-Finch Species

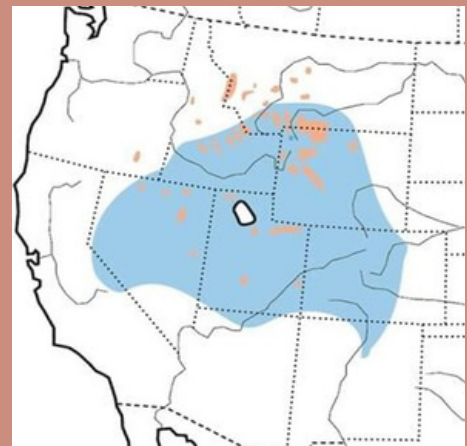
Black Rosy-Finch

Black Rosy-finches have a striking black plumage in the summer and subdued dark brownish charcoal color in the winter. This species has wing, flank, and undertail feathers highlighted in a rosy color. Black rosy-finches also have a light grey patch extending behind each eye. Bill color changes from yellowish in the fall and early winter to black in the breeding season. Males and females look similar, except females have a more muted brownish-gray overall as compared to the darker males.



Range

Black Rosy-Finches breed in areas highlighted in orange and in the winter (blue) can be found across portions of the West.



Credit: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2019

Meet the Rosy-Finch Species

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

Brown-capped Rosy-finches lack the bold gray crown of the Black and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches and instead have a dull, brownish crown patch. The Brown-capped has a warm brown body. They can have either a yellow or black bill, and also have rosy flank and wing highlights. Brown-capped Rosy-finches have the most restricted range of any of our three rosy-finch species, and are rarely seen outside of Colorado and New Mexico.



Credit: Lori Nixon

Range

**Rare outside of Colorado
and New Mexico**

Brown-capped Rosy-Finches breed in areas highlighted in orange and in the winter (blue) can be found across portions of Colorado and New Mexico.



Credit: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2019

Meet the Rosy-Finch Species

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches have a warm brown body and a gray head patch. This species shares the either yellow or black bill and rosy flank and wing highlights. If you are birding in the western half of the Rocky Mountain Region, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches will probably dominate flock counts.

There are two subspecies of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch that occur in the Rocky Mountains: Interior and Coastal (or Hepburn's). You can tell them apart by the amount of gray they have in their head. The interior subspecies has a swath of gray from the eye going around the back of the head. The Coastal (Hepburn's) subspecies has gray covering most of the head.

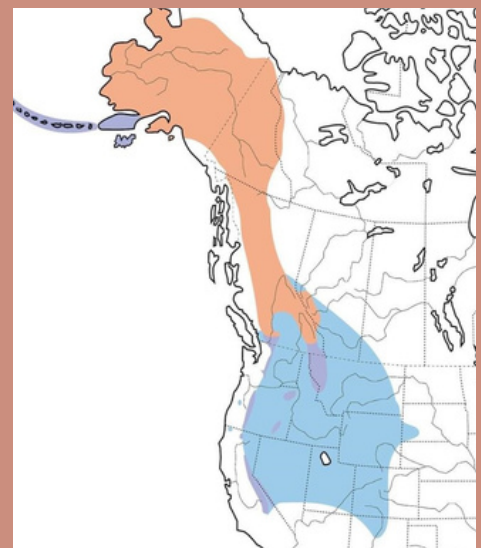
"Coastal" or "Hepburn's" Subspecies



"Interior" Subspecies

Range

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches breed in areas highlighted in orange and in the winter (blue) can be found across the West. They can be found year-round in purple areas.



Credit: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2019

Feeder Count Methods

Step 1. Select Your Feeder

Using this protocol, anyone can conduct a Rosy-finch Feeder Count at a personal or local bird feeder. Your site should be an area that is convenient and easy for you to visit.

Designate the "survey area" around your feeder. Choose obvious boundaries, such as the border of your yard or a hedgerow. You will count the birds that enter your survey area.



An example below shows the location of the bird feeder and the boundaries (pink) of the survey area that were set. Create boundaries based on how well you can keep track of birds at your feeder!

Tips

- A list of known public bird feeders can be found on the Project webpage, but it is by no means exhaustive.
- Limit your survey area to no larger than two tennis courts.
- Best management of feeders is included in the following section.

Feeder Count Methods

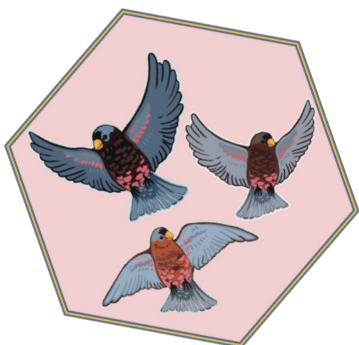
Step 2. Schedule Your Dates

Action Required!

Schedule your standard Feeder Counts using the [Schedule Counts Form](#) found at the [Rosy-Finch Project webpage](#).

When you schedule your counts, you will:

- Receive your 22-23 Project sticker in the mail.
- Be entered into the raffle for a pair of ZEISS Terra ED 8x32 binoculars!



The Feeder Count season runs from December 1, 2022 to the end of April 2023. This season is broken into five month-long count windows. Please select 1 day within each month to conduct a standard Feeder Count, totaling five count days.

Schedule your standard Feeder Counts in advance and attempt to space counts at least 5 days apart. Counts do not need to be conducted on the same day of the week or time of day as previous counts. Select times and dates convenient to your schedule!

Tips

- If you travel to your feeder site, NEVER put your safety in jeopardy. It's OK to skip or reschedule a Feeder Count if travel conditions are unsafe.
- Need to reschedule a missed a count? That's OK!
- Remember, zero counts are OK and vitally important.
- Have bears in your area and need wait until they hibernate? That's OK!

Feeder Count Methods

Step 3. Count Birds

On your scheduled days, conduct your standard Feeder County by watching your feeder survey area for exactly 20 minutes. Count the maximum number or "high count" of each rosy-finch species and chickadees you were able to see AT ANY ONE time. Do not sum or tally birds seen at different times. Make every attempt to NOT double-count birds if they are moving around. If the flock flies off before you finished counting, use the highest number you counted to.

If you do not see any rosy-finches of any species, do not fret! Counts with 0 rosy-finches gives us valuable data too. You may count other bird species, but this is optional.

Want to do extra Feeder Counts? Extra or unscheduled "Opportunistic" Feeder Counts are welcome and use the same methods. You can submit as many opportunistic Feeder Counts, as frequently as you like.

Tips

- Only includes birds that are visible and identifiable.
- Do not count birds flying over your count area who are not interacting with your feeding area.
- Opportunistic Feeder Counts can be done anytime and at any bird feeder.
- Practice counting flocks using tutorials found at: <https://ebird.org/news/counting-201>



Counting birds can be a tricky, even for professionals. Birds group up and obscure each other, they move around, they might enter and exit the count area quickly. All these factors present potential errors into the data we collect.

There are several methods to help count birds more accurately. The following trips draw heavily or are reproduced from eBird, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others. Remember, do your best and always strive to get better!

Counting Tips 101

Tip No. 1: Write Things Down

How many times have you gone to the grocery store and come home without that one item you went for? Even those of us with the best of memories can easily forget a number or get counts of two species mixed up. For this project, we want to ensure the counts we report are the highest number seen AT ANY ONE time. This method gives us a more accurate depiction of how many individuals there are. If we sat at a feeder for 20 minutes and observed chickadees using the feeder 42 times that does not mean there were 42 chickadees!

By recounting the flock every few minutes and recording these “sub-counts”, we can look at all the counts and find our highest count. For example, your sub-counts might look like:

Black Rosy-Finch: 2, 4, 3

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: 20, 23, 7, 2, 10

Mountain Chickadee: 3, 2, 1, 2

We can see that there is a high count for each species we observed. We will report the high count on our datasheet.



Counting Tips 101

Tip No. 2: Be Conservative

Everyone tends to either over-estimate or under-estimate numbers. We want to promote conservative counting. Strive for the best count of the birds you saw during your 20-minute Feeder Count. The goal is not to break records for a site, but to provide an accurate count of what is present at that time.

Double counting is counting one bird twice. Inevitably, it is going to happen. But keeping this in mind can help you reduce how often it happens in your counts! Double counting can also happen when a flock is jostling around at the feeder. Sometimes it's good to take a look at the flock overall for a cursory estimate of the group as a whole and or each species, if you can. For example, you could estimate "I think there are roughly 10 Black Rosy-finches and 30 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches." From there you can then focus on individuals and try to track them as they move around. If your count is way off from your estimate, consider both numbers. Were you double counting? Or did you notice more hidden birds during your inspection? You can always count again and see what you get! Do your best.

Counting Tips 101

If counting in blocks of 5 birds, our estimate would be 25 birds. The actual count is 26.



Tip No. 3: Blocking Method

When counting flocks, one of the best ways to estimate birds is by using the blocking method. This entails selecting a section of the flock and counting them up to a number you can easily visualize.

For example, if the flock is a moderate size, count a group of five birds. See how much space they occupy in the flock. Then draw an imaginary block around them and move that block around the flock to count in groups of five. If you counted five total blocks of five, then your estimated count is 25 birds. This works best in single species flocks, or to get an estimate of the total birds before you start a more direct count. In large flocks, you may need to count in groups of 10 or more.

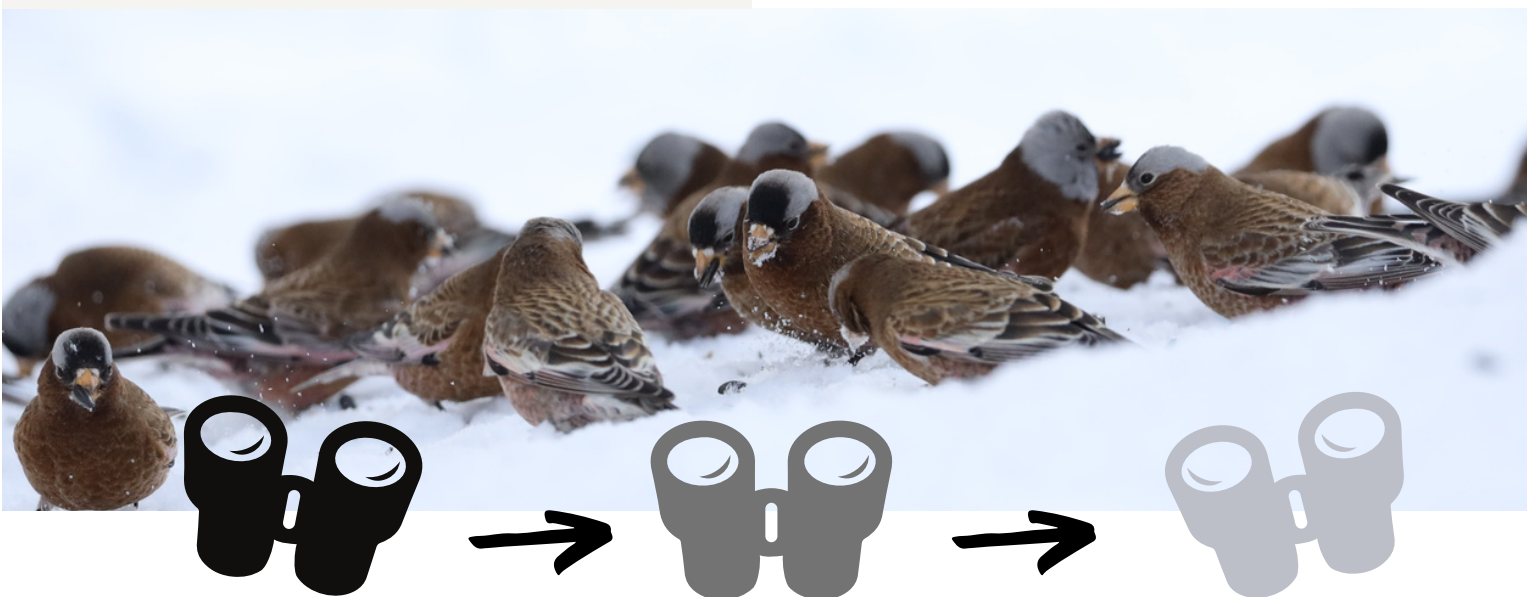
When you have a blocked count and a more direct count of the same species, you should report the more accurate count, whatever you think that is (usually the direct count).

Tip No. 4: Scanning Method

The scanning method is where you systematically scan a flock, such as from left to right, for a particular species. As you scan, keep a running tally of the number of individuals you are searching for. Once you have scanned the flock and gotten a number of that species, repeat the same process with another species, and so on.

The advantage of this count style is that once you get a mental search image for the species you are targeting, you can rapidly scan through the flock and get a number of individuals of that species. This works particularly well in large groups of birds when the species you want is in low proportions. This also works well if individuals in the flock are moving around but staying in the same area.

Counting Tips 101



Feeder Count Methods

Step 4. Look For Banded Birds



If you are able to obtain a count of rosy-finches and chickadees during your Feeder Count, then look at the legs of every rosy-finch you can see. Some of those finches may have leg bands that are part of other research efforts.

First, record the number of rosy-finches you were able to look at for leg bands. For example, if the flock happens to fly off after you could only see 10 out of the 25 rosy-finches, record 10 as your number of birds looked at for bands. Overall, be conservative.

Then, record the number that had leg bands. The bands could be metal or plastic. The plastic band colors may include black, white, gray, pink, red, green, yellow, blue, and purple.

Tips

- Birds may have one or two bands.
- If you have access to a camera, attempt to take a photo!
- If you have access to a powerful lens and camera, we may be able to read digits off of the band and get detailed information about the rosy-finch.

Feeder Count Methods

Step 5. Record & Submit Data

Record

For each Feeder Count, fill out a datasheet (attached at the end of this Guide). Report your name(s) and date. The latitude and longitude of your feeder can be obtained from Google Maps or ask coordinators for help. Record the start and end time. Remember, Feeder Counts need to be exactly 20 minutes! Check the type of survey you did. Standard surveys are your scheduled surveys. Opportunistic surveys are "extras." Record the weather to the best of your ability.

Record your high count of rosy-finches and chickadees. If you do not see any rosy-finches during your count, we want to know that! There is as much data in zero counts as positive counts, and zero counts are critical to our understanding of rosy-finch movements.

Submit Data - 3 Options

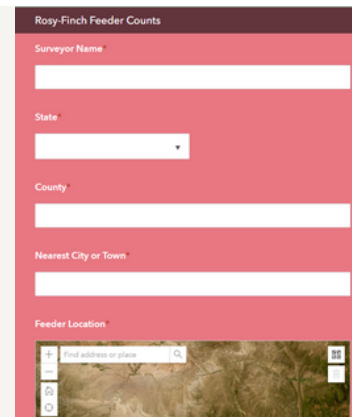
Enter Your Own Data into the Database:

Online, navigate to <https://arcgis.is/Wij9u> and "Open in Browser"

Email or text a picture of your data sheet to:

rosyfinchstudy@gmail.com

Put your datasheet in the mail to: Sageland Collaborative 824
South 400 West Suite B119, Salt Lake City, UT 84101



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Rosy-Finch Feeder Counts". It contains several input fields: "Surveyor Name" (a text box), "State" (a dropdown menu), "County" (a text box), and "Nearest City or Town" (a text box). At the bottom, there is a "Feeder Location" section with a Google Maps interface showing a search bar and a map view of a field.

Create Safe Feeding Spaces for Birds



Yes! Clean Your Feeder

Our feathered friends have an increased risk of catching viruses and illnesses from dirty bird feeders. We adhere to recommendations from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and ask that you clean your bird feeders about once every 2 weeks. With a few easy household items, this is simple to add to your bird feeding routine.

Use an brush (e.g., old toothbrush) to scrap off debris. Soak or dip your feeder in a bucket of diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water). Rinse or dip with regular water and allow to dry before refilling. Wear gloves when possible and always wash your hands. Before you purchase your next bird feeder think about features that make it easier to clean like being made of plastic.

The project coordinators keep in touch with state wildlife agencies to monitor outbreaks of bird illness. While not common, we may need to suspend Feeder Counts in certain regions. If you see sick or dead birds at your bird feeder, remove the feeder for at least 2 weeks and allow the flock to disperse. This will help reduce spread. Contact your coordinators if you have questions or concerns. Bird health is our priority, even if it means missing a scheduled Feeder Count.

Window Strikes

Millions of birds are killed every year from collisions with windows. Don't let this happen to your flock! By breaking up the reflections on windows, this can save a bird's life. Attach streamers, decorations, or even post-it notes to your windows to help birds see that your window is not a pathway for flight.



Thank you!

Thank you for joining the team of rosy-finchers this winter and we appreciate you!

Be safe and have fun!

eNewsletter

A Rosy-Finch eNewsletter will hit your inbox once a month, watch for updates, reminders, and links to project resources.

Social Media

We love hearing from our community scientists. Share your Feeder Count photos and stories with us at rosyfinchstudy@gmail.com or tag [@sagelandcollab](#) and [@tracyaviary](#) on social media. There is a Rosy-Finch Project Facebook Group at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rosyfinchproject/>

Resources



Helpful resources can be found at:
sagelandcollaborative.org/rosy-finch

Project Email:
rosyfinchstudy@gmail.com

Rosy-Finch Feeder Counts - Datasheet

Fill out the datasheet for 20-minute Standard or Opportunistic Feeder Counts. Record weather and the highest number of individual rosy-finches and chickadees you see at one time during the Feeder Count. You may also record other bird species if you wish, but it is not required. During your 20-minute feeder count, look at the legs of rosy-finches for metal or colored leg bands and record.

Submit your data on Survey123, here: <https://arcgis.wjtu>

or you may email a photo or scan of the datasheet to: rosyfinchstudy@gmail.com



Surveyor Name(s): _____

Location (Coordinates) of Feeder: Lat: _____ ° Lon: _____ °

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): _____ **Start Time (24-hr, hh:mm):** _____ **End Time (24-hr, hh:mm):** _____

Remember! Surveys must be 20 minutes long!

Survey Type (Check one): Standard Survey Opportunistic Survey

Weather

Temperature _____ °F

Wind Speed * _____ mph

Wind Direction _____

Snow Depth _____ inches

Precipitation Clear Cloudy
 (Check all that apply) Rain Snow
 Fog Wintry-mix

Bird Counts

Species	Highest # Observed	# finches Banded	# finches surveyed for bands	Color of band(s)?
Black Rosy-Finch	_____	_____	_____	_____
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	_____	_____	_____	_____
Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	_____	_____	_____	_____
Black-capped Chickadee	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mountain Chickadee	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notes (as applicable):				

***Description of Wind (mph) Speeds**

- <1 = Calm, smoke rises vertically
- 1-3 = Light air, smoke drifts
- 4-7 = Light breeze, wind felt on face, leaves rustle
- 8-12 = Gentle breeze, leaves and twigs in motion
- 13-18 = Moderate, raises dust, small branches move
- 19-24 = Fresh breeze, small trees begin to sway
- 25-31 = Strong breeze, large branches in motion
- 32+ = High wind or greater, whole trees in motion