

## House Finches, *continued from page 9*

(Jefferson County) in November 1971 (Bohlen 1986).

In fact, the Breeding Bird Survey shows a phenomenal increase of 21% per year from 1966-1979 in the region east of the Mississippi (Robbins et al. 1986). In 1982, the first House Finches confirmed breeding in Illinois were found with chicks in Robinson (Crawford County) on the eastern edge of the state (Bohlen 1986). By 1987 they were still more common on the eastern side of the state and were steadily increasing elsewhere in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). House Finches were first confirmed breeding in Cook County in 1985 (Anderson pers. com.). The House Finches we observed breeding in our yard in 1991 nested in a hanging planter on our front porch. This is a common nest site, as are dense conifers, street lamps, ivy growing on buildings, and similar human-altered landscape features (Hill 1993). According to the Cook County Nesting Season Bird Census, House Finches have increased in total numbers observed during the report period of 1-14 June from 6 birds in 1985 to 870 birds in 1995 (Anderson pers. com.).

### Interaction with House Sparrows

When we first started observing House Finches at our feeders in 1987 they were far outnumbered by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and appeared to be dominated by them. While one researcher found House Sparrows to be dominant to House

Finches in the laboratory (Kalinowski 1975), and this correlates with field observations from the western United States (Bent 1968), observers of the two species' interactions in the eastern states report a standoff (Elliott and Arbib 1953, Katholi 1967).

House Finches and House Sparrows have almost exactly the same adult diet (Bent 1968). Both live in areas of human activity and nest around buildings and on ivy-covered

the House Finches. This anecdotal evidence is corroborated by Kricher (1983), who reported that House Sparrows had ceased to nest on a college campus in Massachusetts after the arrival of House Finches.

Eastern House Finches have undergone a clear evolutionary morphological divergence from their parent population (Aldrich and Weske 1978). Eastern House Finches more frequently coexist with House Spar-



*House Finch feeding young at nest in Springfield, IL, 9 June 1986. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.*

walls (Wootton 1987). Direct competition apparently occurs between House Sparrows and House Finches, as three researchers have found a correlation between rising House Finch numbers and falling populations of House Sparrows (Kricher 1983, Robbins et al. 1986, Wootton 1987).

The Cook County Nesting Bird Season Census has not demonstrated as clear a negative correlation between House Finch numbers and House Sparrow numbers as found by other researchers. House Sparrow numbers in Cook County have undergone tremendous fluctuations between years (Anderson pers. com.). However, we have found that there are many fewer House Sparrows in our neighborhood and at our feeders than there were before the arrival of

rows than do their western conspecifics. The increased presence of House Sparrows may have provided the selection pressure responsible for the evolution of the eastern House Finch into a competitor superior to the House Sparrow (Kricher 1983).

Project Feeder-Watch is a volunteer program coordinated by Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology and The Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada. Statistics for common species which utilize bird feeders have been compiled from data provided by volunteers observing feeders in their yards from the winter of 1987/1988 to the present. Although these statistics have not yet been published, Diane Tessaglia of Project FeederWatch was kind enough to provide me with the data for Illinois (Laboratory of Ornithol-