

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*



Folk Name: Redpoll Linnet

Status: Winter Visitor

Abundance: Casual/Erratic (irruptive)

Habitat: Open areas, old fields, early successional thickets

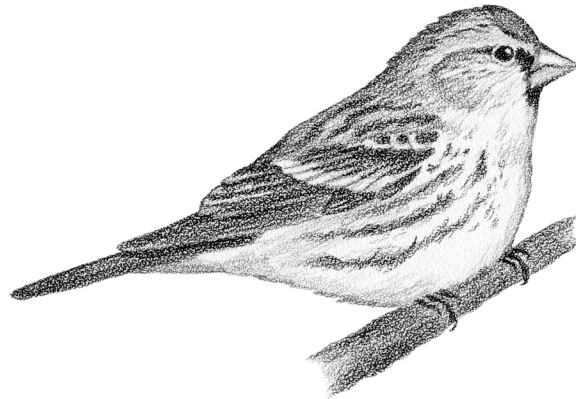
The Common Redpoll is arguably the most elusive species of winter finch that can be encountered in the Piedmont of the Carolinas. Redpolls are the size of a goldfinch and have noticeable streaking on their flanks and rump. They are also known for their stubby, pointed yellow bill. Males show some muted red or rose-pink coloring below. Both sexes have a red cap and black chin. These birds periodically irrupt out of the boreal forests in the far north and head southward in search of food, but few make it this far south. Irruptions are usually triggered by a decline in abundance of birch catkins—a primary winter food source.

The earliest published report of the Common Redpoll in the Central Carolinas is a sighting documented by Donald G. Allison, a Game Management Specialist with the North Carolina Wildlife Commission. Mr. Allison reported a flock of 20 redpolls “feeding in the short grass of the back lawn” of a motor court in the town of Spencer in Rowan County on February 20, 1952. The birds were only 10 feet away from him and “were very actively engaged in feeding and so turning in all directions, thus affording views from all angles.”

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, multiple sightings of “redpolls” were reported during the winter from feeders in both Carolinas. On many occasions these “redpolls” were determined to actually be House Finches, a species that was expanding its presence into the Southeast at the time. Many redpoll reports from the period were suspect as it took some time for birders to learn to differentiate between these two birds.

The second acceptable published sight record of Common Redpoll in the region is from Mecklenburg County. Two pairs of Common Redpolls arrived in March of 1964 at the window feeder of Mrs. James S. Gray. They fed there for most of the month and were last seen on April 3, 1964. According to Rhett Chamberlain, who was chair of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee at the time, “[o]n 4 April, Mrs. W.H. Cobey and Mrs. J.R. Norwood, both competent observers, visited Mrs. Gray and were convinced of the correctness of her identification. The sight record is carried here because of their acceptance of it.”

One redpoll was reported in Stanly County on December 15, 1977, by observers participating in the Stanly County Christmas Bird Count. The bird was



accepted as part of the count results, but it appears the count results were not submitted for official publication. Unfortunately, no details of this rare bird sighting were ever published.

The last report of a Common Redpoll from the Central Carolinas during the twentieth century came in 1981. Anne and Blayne Olsen provided “convincing details” regarding a very late female Common Redpoll visiting their thistle feeder near Monroe in Union County, NC, from 11 March through 15 March. This report was later reviewed and published in *The Chat*.

Park Rangers working on top of Baker’s Mountain in Catawba County located a Common Redpoll on December 5, 2003. They reported another there on January 6, 2008. Ranger Dwayne Martin reported hearing a Common Redpoll at St. Stephens Park on December 3, 2012. While observing a flock of Pine Siskins, he wrote: “I stopped, watched, and listened and heard something different. It was a Common Redpoll giving its rattle chit-chit-chit call. I’m hoping it will come to the feeders at some point with the siskins.”

One Common Redpoll was photographed at a feeder in Alamance County during February 2011, and one was photographed at a feeder in Guilford County in March 2011. A Common Redpoll was reported visiting a bird feeder in southern Mecklenburg County around January 10–11, 2013. No details were provided. One was photographed at a feeder in Forsyth County on March 8, 2013. A Common Redpoll was reported drinking from a bird bath in Rock Hill on November 29, 2013. No identification details were provided for this bird. On February 2, 2015, a Common Redpoll was reported in northeast Davie County. The observer noted its “classic red cap and a little red on the breast.”