

PURPLE FINCHES FEED ON WILLOW CATKINS

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Abstract -- Two male Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*) were seen feeding on willow catkins. Members of this genus, and also sparrows, are known to feed on parts of flowers, but there does not appear to be previous documentation of willow catkins being consumed.

Key words: Purple Finches, *Carpodacus purpureus*, food, feeding habits, willow, *Salix*, flowers, catkins.

On March 13, 2004, two male Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*) were observed feeding on willow catkins (*Salix* sp.), in the Conservation Area at Maplewood Flats, North Vancouver, B.C. Martin, *et.al.* (1951) do not list *Salix* in their analysis of the feeding habits of this species, however, those authors note "...the rosy coloured warbling songsters obtain a large share of their springtime food by eating buds or tree flowers...". At Maplewood, I have seen Purple Finches feeding on both cherry (*Prunus avium*) and Pacific crabapple (*Malus fusca*) flowers.

Flower consumption is a habit shared by other *Carpodacus* species, as well as sparrows. Both the Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) and Song Sparrow (*Melospinza melodia*) regularly consume the inner parts (stamens, pistil) of salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*). Petals, and other non-reproductive parts, which apparently have no food value, are not consumed (Jude Grass, Surrey, B.C., personal communication). Nectar consumption is borne out by the fact that *Carpodacus* finches are regular visitors to hummingbird feeders.

Foraging on willow catkins may not be a rare occurrence, but I could not find it documented in the literature. For willow flowers, it seems reasonable to speculate that staminate flowers, in particular, are consumed for their pollen content (fat and protein).

LITERATURE CITED

- Clements, P. 1999. Finches and sparrows. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 500 p.
- Martin, A, H. Zim and A. Nelson. 1951. American wildlife plants: a guide to wildlife food habits. Dover Publications, Mineola, N.Y. 473 p.

Purple Finch / Bill Heybroek

