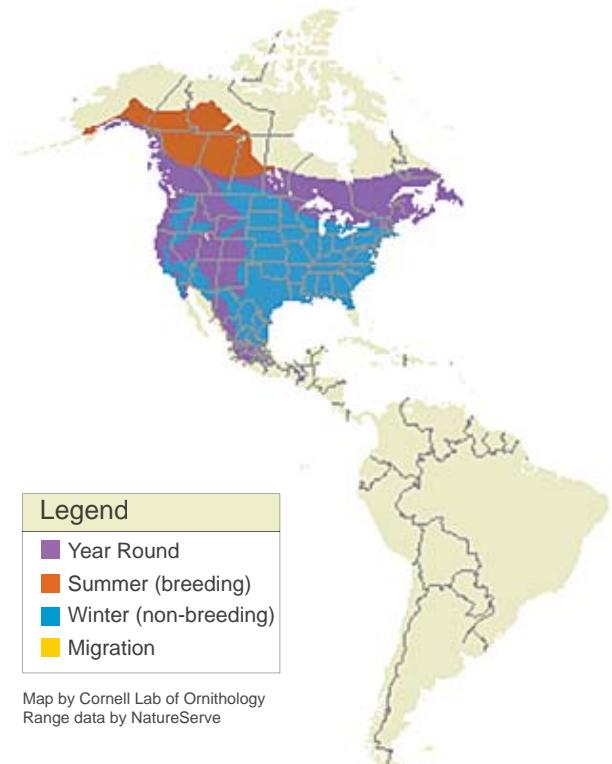


Pine Siskin

Spinus pinus

Flocks of tiny Pine Siskins may monopolize your thistle feeder one winter and be absent the next. This nomadic finch ranges widely and erratically across the continent each winter in response to seed crops. Better suited to clinging to branch tips than to hopping along the ground, these brown-streaked acrobats flash yellow wing markings as they flutter while feeding or as they explode into flight. Flocks are gregarious, and you may hear their insistent wheezy twitters before you see them.



Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Pine Siskins are very small songbirds with sharp, pointed bills and short, notched tails. Their uniquely shaped bill is more slender than that of most finches. In flight, look for their forked tails and pointed wingtips.

Color Pattern

Pine siskins are brown and very streaky birds with subtle yellow edgings on wings and tails. Flashes of yellow can erupt as they take flight, flutter at branch tips, or display during mating.

Behavior

Pine Siskins often visit feeders in winter (particularly for thistle or nyjer seed) or cling to branch tips of pines and other conifers, sometimes hanging upside down to pick at seeds below them. They are gregarious, foraging in tight flocks and twittering incessantly to each other, even during their undulating flight.

Habitat

Although Pine Siskins prefer coniferous or mixed coniferous and deciduous forests with open canopies, they are opportunistic and adaptable in their search for seeds. They'll forage in weedy fields, scrubby thickets, or backyards and gardens. And they'll flock around feeders, especially thistle feeders, in woodlands and suburbs.

Cool Facts

- Pine Siskins get through cold nights by ramping up their metabolic rates—typically 40% higher than a “normal” songbird of their size. When temperatures plunge as low as -70°C (-94°F), they can accelerate that rate up to five times normal for several hours. They also put on half again as much winter fat as their Common Redpoll and American Goldfinch relatives.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 4.3 - 5.5 inches
- Wingspan - 7.1 - 8.7
- Weight - 0.4 - 0.6 ounces