

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD \_\_\_\_\_ UNUSUAL RECORD X**Species:** Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*)**Date:** 5 May 2002**Number seen:** one**Sex:** ?**Plumage:** Basic (brown)**Locality:** Casita, Chico Basin Ranch**Elevation:** ~1560 m**Nearest town:** Hanover**County:** El Paso**Time observed:** afternoon**Duration of observation:** ~9 minutes

**Description:** While birding with Nancy Gobris around the house called Casita on the Chico Basin Ranch, I found a brown-plumaged *Carpodacus* finch eating elm seeds near the top of the elm just across the road to the east of the house. I immediately recognized it for a Purple Finch, and, as it was foraging quite leisurely in the tree, I broke out the scope (through which I had excellent half-frame views) to study the bird for this documentation.

The bird was a chunky mostly brown-and-white passerine with a dark, thick, conical bill. It was gray-brown above from beak to tail and the back had distinct blackish streaks with some whitish highlights. The underparts were white with blackish streaking that was heaviest on the chest and faded to blurry brown streaking on the flanks with no discernable streaks on the undertail coverts. The culmen was slightly curved, not the arrow-straight culmen of Cassin's Finch. The bird's superciliary was fairly bright white, originating in front of the eye, continuing broadly past the eye and curving down around the auriculars, and containing some gray-brown streaks. The malar region was whitish, contrasting strongly with a wide, blackish lateral throat stripe. I could find no trace of a white eye ring typical of Cassin's Finch. The primary tips fell about even with the tips of the undertail coverts and the primary projection was not quite as long as the longest tertial. The bird had brown wings with two indistinct wingbars. The legs were dark.

Similar species eliminated: As Nancy Gobris, living in Georgia, had never had cause to learn the subtle differences between Purple and Cassin's finches, I made a point of showing her all of these characters, stressing the head pattern (particularly the superciliary, the lack of a thin, white eye ring, and the malar region), bill shape, and the streaking on the lower part of the underparts, all of which were typical of Purple Finch and incorrect for Cassin's. There are no other serious ID contenders, though some might confuse either of these two species with a *Pheucticus* grosbeak, a sparrow, or a female Red-winged Blackbird. However, the usual mistake goes in the opposite direction.

**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** No vocalizations heard.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen 1000s each of Purple and Cassin's finches. I have never seen Common Rosefinch (or any other *Carpodacus* finch), and did not here eliminate them.

**Light conditions:** sky was mostly cloudy with the sun behind me and to my left

**Optical equipment used:** Leica 32x and Swarovski 8.5x42

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated closest approach of ~6 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** Nancy Gobris

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** none

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** I did not photograph

**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

**a) at time of observation:** none

**b) after observation:** none

**Reporting observer:** Tony Leukering

**Signature:** 

**Address:** Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603

**Date report was written:** 17 January 2004 from extensive notes written on the evening of the sighting