

Our Stanford Feathered Friends

By Scott Pinson, Zone Project Manager

This past summer, the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences located at 30 Alta Road received a much needed deck replacement, an exterior paint job, and a new set of exterior site stairs. After many months of planning and design to get the project underway, we were immediately challenged on the first day of actual construction with numerous birds occupying nests under the deck where work was to occur.



Thankfully, the outstanding people (Alan Launer & Esther Cole) in the Stanford Conservation Program within LBRE's Land Use & Environmental Planning Department came to the rescue to ensure our preconstruction efforts were in compliance with the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Our feathered friends? House Finches (*Haemorhous mexicanus*).

As quoted from Wikipedia, these birds are mainly permanent residents throughout their range; some northern and eastern birds migrate south. Their breeding habitat is urban and suburban areas in eastern North America as well as various semi-open areas in the west from southern Canada to California and the Mexican state of Oaxaca; the population in central Chiapas may be descended from escaped caged birds.



Originally only a resident of Mexico and the southwestern United States, they were introduced to eastern North America in the 1940s. The birds were sold illegally in New York City as "Hollywood Finches," a marketing artifice. To avoid prosecution under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, vendors and owners released the birds. They have become naturalized; in largely un-forested land across the Eastern U.S., they have displaced the native purple finch and even the non-native house sparrow. In 1870, or before, they were introduced into Hawaii and are now abundant on all its major islands.



Since a few of nests were active at 30 Alta, including a late spring, second round hatch of baby finches, work was held off in the nesting areas allowing the babies to naturally fledge. After about three weeks, the Conservation Program biologists gave us the ok to proceed as our friends gracefully departed allowing us to tidy up their home.

Next time you are in the area, stop by and check out the new deck and be sure to look up in the tree canopies. The finches blend into the trees well but are abundant and actively enjoying the view of Stanford from up the hill.