

# TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WYOMING

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 205

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Subject: BROWN-CAPPED ROSY FINCH\*

## General

The brown-capped rosy finch (Leucosticte australis) is a bird of the alpine tundra, breeding only in Colorado, south-eastern Wyoming, and northern New Mexico, primarily at altitudes greater than 12,000 ft (3,658 m). Within its limited range, the brown-capped rosy finch is a common resident. The bird is an altitudinal migrant and winters with flocks of other members of the genus osticte at elevations down to 6,000 ft (1,829 m).

## Food Requirements

Seeds constitute the major portion of the diet with insects and small plant fruits being consumed less frequently. The winter diet is essentially herbaceous with roadside plants, especially Russian thistle, contributing substantially to the diet. Brown-capped rosy finches commonly feed on seeds and dead or torpid insects blown onto snowfields. As snowfields diminish, foraging occurs near cliff bases and rock slides.

During winter the birds may travel 2,000 to 3,000 ft (610 to 914 m) vertically from their roosts to feed. Snow cover, by hindering foraging, limits the winter distribution of rosy finches.



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\*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Water Requirements

No records exist of the brown-capped rosy finch eating snow to meet its water needs. The lack of free water at high elevations is the critical factor which causes rosy finches to seek lower elevations in the fall.

Cover Requirements

The brown-capped rosy finch requires nesting and roosting cover during the reproductive season, as well as winter roosting cover. The adult not on the nest at night (presumed to be the male) commonly roosts in a rock crevice nearby.

Mixed flocks of rosy finches roost communally in winter often in abandoned mines and other manmade structures. Natural roosting sites include blowholes and cliff swallow casings and may be as low as 5 ft (1.5 m) from the ground.

Reproductive Requirements

Nests are usually placed in a hole or crevice in a sheer rock cliff at heights ranging from 6 to 40 ft (1.8 to 12 m) above the base of the cliff. Brown-capped rosy finches also nest in buildings if located in suitable habitat, as well as caves. All nests reported by one study were found hidden in shadow.

Nests are commonly constructed from dry grasses, flower stems, and alpine moss (Sphagnum spp.). Several nests may be located in the same cave; in one instance, five nests were found in one cave with an average distance of five feet (1.5 m) between nests.

Special Habitat Requirements

No special habitat requirements were found in the literature.

Interspersion Requirements

A combination of alpine tundra, precipitous cliffs, talus slides, and slow-melting snowbanks provides optimal breeding habitat for the brown-capped rosy finch.