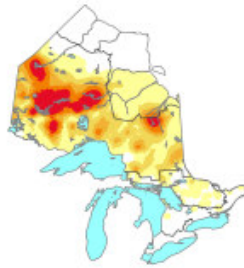


Pine Siskin Factsheet

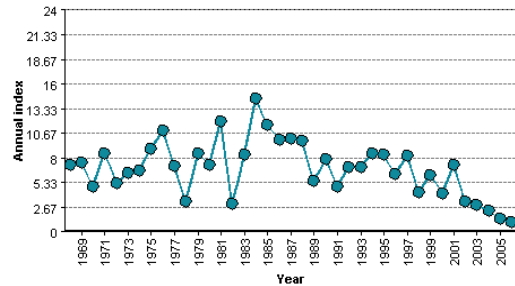
Boreal Bird Toolkit



Pine Siskin



Relative Abundance



Breeding Bird Survey Index Trend 1968-2006 (Canada)

Description and biology: The Pine Siskin is a small (11-14cm), brown, heavily-streaked finch with a slender bill and notched tail. Field marks include whitish or buff-coloured wingbars, and yellow on both the outer tail and flight feathers. It is a social, mainly seed-eating finch, known for its erratic and unpredictable nomadic movements. This species is sometimes overlooked in wintering flocks of American Goldfinch, with which it often associates.

Habitat requirements: The Pine Siskin breeds in forest types of various ages and densities, and may occasionally be found in urban areas with ornamental or shade trees. Siskins prefer conifers as a nesting site but will forage in a wide variety of habitats and plant associations, as well as at bird feeders.

Natural history: Erratic movements of this species are presumably related to variation in seed crops from year to year. Attachment to a particular breeding area is not fixed, and some individuals may breed on favourable wintering grounds if they linger long enough.

Conservation status: Of the North American and world population, nearly 50% breed in Canada's boreal forest. Breeding Bird Surveys reveal that the Pine Siskin declined by a statistically significant 2.4% per year across Canada between 1968 and 2006, and during the same time period declined by a near-significant 4.5% per year in Ontario. However, it is difficult to determine population changes accurately because this is an "irruptive" species, with populations fluctuating and moving according to available food.

Environmental threats: Clearing of coniferous forest likely causes population reductions, but some forestry practices may improve habitat quality by increasing forest edge and open spaces. Winter bird feeding may reduce seasonal mortality through the provision of seed, but the Pine Siskin is susceptible to *Salmonella* infections which can be spread easily at unclean bird feeders.

Conservation opportunities: The present strongholds for this species in Ontario are the conifer forests of the northwest and northeast, including frontier forest habitats north of the current limit of commercial forestry. Large-scale clearcuts are seen to be harmful to this species. Within areas of commercial forestry activity, longer rotation periods would likely be beneficial. Since the Pine Siskin is known as a natural nomad, variation in areas of high concentration should be anticipated, but retention of large areas of conifer forest is required to steward this species over the long term.

Boreal Bird Toolkit:

Toolkit and factsheet: © Wildlife Conservation Society Canada and G.G. Beck Ecological Consulting 2008

Breeding Bird Survey: courtesy Canadian Wildlife Service, volunteers & coordinators; www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/mgbc/trends

Abundance map and point count data: courtesy *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*; www.birdsontario.org

Photo: © Gregor G. Beck. See toolkit for literature cited.