

Commonly Confused Species

When you see any of these species, check the major features listed below to help tell them apart. Usually a combination of key field marks is needed to make a positive identification. Please refer to a field guide for assistance.

Chipping Sparrow / American Tree Sparrow / House Sparrow

Chipping Sparrows migrate farther south for the winter and are not usually found in New Hampshire until May. In February, they are in their winter plumage, which does not have a rusty cap. The slightly larger Tree Sparrows are frequently called "Winter Chippies" because they resemble our Chipping Sparrows of summer but appear here only in the winter. Both Tree Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows have a brown back and white breast but in the winter, only the Tree Sparrow has the rusty cap. Although the Tree Sparrow has a spot on the breast, it is not always visible and the absence of a spot is not reliable for identification purposes. Male and female look alike in both species. Female House Sparrows, usually found in more urban areas and near farms, may also be confused with winter Chipping Sparrows.

American Tree Sparrow	Chipping Sparrow (winter)	House Sparrow (female)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > rusty cap > gray line above eye > small rusty line through eye > grayish-white breast, sometimes with a spot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > brown cap, may be lightly streaked--not rusty > dull white line above eye > slight dark line through eye, not a black line > grayish-white breast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > brown cap, no streaks > brownish-white line above eye > slight dark line through eye > brownish-white breast

Sharp-shinned Hawk / Cooper's Hawk

A hawk at the feeder is often one of these two species. The difference between the Sharp-shinned Hawk and the Cooper's Hawk is subtle, and even veteran hawkwatchers have trouble telling them apart. The Cooper's is threatened in New Hampshire, and is not as common as the Sharp-shinned. Both species feed on small, woodland songbirds and look identical, both as immatures and adults. In general, the Cooper's is larger than the "Sharpie" but the female Sharpie can be the same size as the male Cooper's. This often makes positive identification very difficult unless you have an obviously smaller Sharpie or an obviously larger Cooper's. Both species are Accipiters, with rounded wings and a long tail, although the Cooper's tail appears rounded and slightly longer. If you can photograph the bird, we may be able to help you identify it correctly. Try to get something in the picture that will help with a size reference. If you are unsure which of these two species it is, please record it as "Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk."

House Finch / Purple Finch

These two species look very similar in size, shape, and color and are difficult to tell apart. Both are slightly larger than a chickadee with a thicker bill and a reddish color on the males. The females are all brown on the back with a streaked breast. The House Finch is usually more common than the Purple Finch.

House Finch	Purple Finch
<p data-bbox="293 1171 548 1205">> Mostly square tail</p> <p data-bbox="245 1268 331 1302">(male)</p> <p data-bbox="293 1314 509 1348">> fire engine red</p> <p data-bbox="293 1386 756 1419">> some streaking on sides of breast</p> <p data-bbox="293 1421 581 1455">> solid brown on back</p> <p data-bbox="245 1478 354 1512">(female)</p> <p data-bbox="293 1524 509 1558">> all brown head</p>	<p data-bbox="873 1157 1146 1190">> Deeply notched tail</p> <p data-bbox="824 1253 911 1287">(male)</p> <p data-bbox="873 1299 1235 1333">> "dipped in" raspberry juice</p> <p data-bbox="873 1371 1312 1404">> very little/no streaking on breast</p> <p data-bbox="873 1407 1299 1467">> some color on back with brown streaks</p> <p data-bbox="824 1493 933 1526">(female)</p> <p data-bbox="873 1539 1211 1572">> white eye stripe on head</p>