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PINE SISKINS IN BREEDING CONDITION ALONG THE NORTH PLATTE RIVER,  
KEITH COUNTY, NEBRASKA, 1993

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Johnsgard (1979) categorizes the Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) as an erratic breeder in a number of eastern and southeastern Nebraska counties. Ducey (1988) considers this species to be a regular nester throughout the state in suitable coniferous habitat. Neither authors have listed breeding records in Keith County, although Ducey cites a record from Chase County (Bennett 1986). The Pine Siskin is known as a breeder in 12 counties in Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1992).

**Methods**

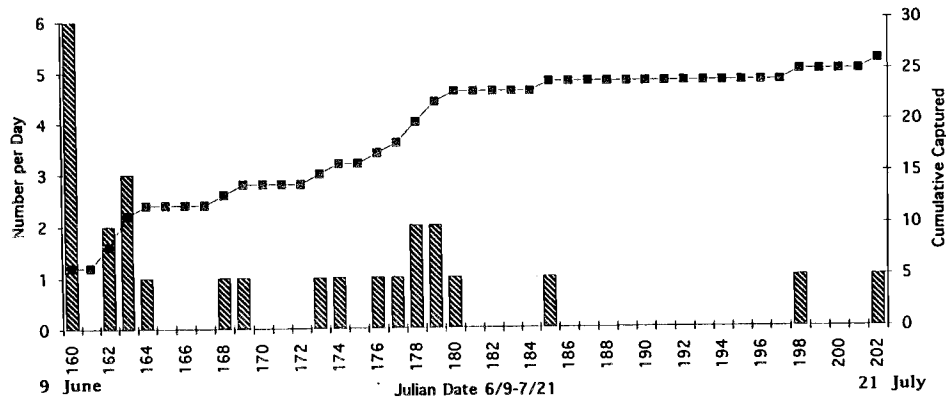
We caught and banded Pine Siskins at Cedar Point Biological Station near Lake Keystone, Keith County, Nebraska (41° 13' N, 101° 38' W) during June and July, 1993. All individuals were caught in standard 36mm mesh mist nets, 12 meters long, near feeders containing niger thistle seeds. The nets were set on the hillsides of steep canyons 25-35 meters above the level of the lake among an interrupted stand of mixed eastern and western cedars (*Juniperus virginiana* and *J. scopulorum*), which were interspersed with warm-season grasses and bare rock outcrops on the Ogallala Sandstone formation.

**Results**

Twenty Pine Siskins were first-captured birds and six were captured a second time, for an accumulation of 26 records for the species (Figure 1). Thirteen of the 20 first-captured birds were females with obvious

brood patches, five were males with cloacal protuberances, and two, captured on 17 and 21 July, were hatching-year birds classified as sex unknown. The period during which the Pine Siskins were caught was 9 June through 21 July. The beginning date agrees with the records of nesting phenology described for (Thompson and Ely 1992). A few individuals lingered far beyond the 21 July nest departure date reported for Kansas.

Figure 1. Pine Siskin captures



Our records show the presence of Pine Siskins over a 43-day period, which coincides with its nesting period. This, coupled with the capture of hatchlings on 17 and 21 July, strongly suggests that this species may have bred at Cedar Point in 1993. We expect to continue this study in subsequent years to establish the possibility of regular nesting by Pine Siskins in these canyonlands. We speculate that the presence of the cedar trees is the habitat variable that attracts them to this area.

#### Acknowledgements

Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard read and commented on this manuscript. Ms. Linda Brown, driven by curiosity to find out what species might be attracted, kindly supplied the niger-thistle seeds and feeders, which resulted in the first capture of Pine Siskins at Cedar Point, as reported in this paper. We are grateful that Berigan was supported by a grant for Summer Undergraduate Research Experience from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to the School of Biological Sciences.

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