

Lesser Goldfinch

By

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The breeding range of this species extends from southwestern Washington, western Oregon, and northern Nevada eastward to northern Colorado and Central Texas, and



Male Lesser Goldfinch

southward to northwestern Peru and northern Venezuela (Farrand, 1989). In the United States, these tiny and colorful little birds are common in western habitats such as open brushy country, open woods, gardens, and wooded streams (Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). They feed mostly on seeds but sometimes eat berries and small insects such as aphids. The Lesser Goldfinches

especially like seeds of the daisy or composite family such as thistle and wild sunflowers. The adults usually forage in flocks except when nesting and look for food in trees, shrubs, and weeds. At the San Pedro House, they usually are most abundant by or on a tubular shaped feeder hung near the house and filled with thistle seeds (pers. obs.).

The breeding season in warmer parts of the southwest extends over much of the year from early spring to mid autumn (Kaufman, 1996). The male courts the female by feeding her and performing a display flight with the wings and tail spread wide and fluttering rapidly while singing. The female mostly or entirely builds the nest, consisting of a compact open cup woven from grass and other plant fibers and lined with plant down. Most often the nest is in the vertical fork of twigs in a shrub or tree, located about 5 to 30 feet above the ground. Sometimes the female places the nest low in bushes or dense weeds. The female usually lays 4 to 5 eggs, sometimes 3 to 6. The eggs are blue to pale blue-green and usually unmarked. The female incubates them for approximately 12 days. The male sometimes feeds the female during

this incubation. Both parents feed the nestlings. There are usually two broods per year but sometimes three.



Female Lesser Goldfinch

These birds are permanent residents in our area (pers. obs.).

Recognition

Characters: (Sibley, 2003) These tiny birds are our smallest goldfinch (length 4.5 inches; wing spread 8 inches) and have a relatively short tail and large darkish colored bill. They usually have a uniform yellowish underside, greenback, and weak wing bars.

Mature males have striking white wing and tail patches and a black cap on the head. In some males, the back is predominantly or totally black. The colors of both sexes are brightest during the breeding season.

References

Farrand, J. Jr. (ed.). 1989. 3 Warblers to Sparrows. The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. Borzoi Book. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 399 p.

Kaufman, K. 1996. Lives of North American Birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xxv+675 p.

Sibley, D. A. 2003. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc. 471 p.