

Songbirds of Missouri

American Goldfinch

American goldfinches are small, seed-eating members of the bird family Fringillidae. Besides being a favorite of nature lovers, the goldfinch's vibrant yellow color has helped earn the bird legislative recognition. It is the state bird of Iowa, New Jersey and Washington!



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Companion activities for this series can be accessed at www.mo-nie.com using code: **birdteach**

Most bird watchers have a favorite species, during spring, few feeder birds get more universal love than the American goldfinch.

The first time you see the bright yellow coloring of the male goldfinch, it's easy to understand why one of this little bird's nicknames is "wild canary." It's also easy to see why this bird is frequently mentioned at places that sell bird feeders and seed.

A native of open grasslands and farm fields, goldfinches are increasingly attracted to urban areas because of the popularity of bird feeding. As with many birds, it's the male that's such an arresting sight. A male goldfinch's spring and summer plumage includes a bright yellow body contrasting with a black cap, a black tail and black wings. The females are olive-colored and do not have the black cap.

During the winter, the male goldfinch loses much of its color. In fact, male goldfinches look like a completely different bird in winter with a dull olive to brownish-olive color. Birds such as cardinals and bluebirds are less vibrant in winter, too, but few lose their color like male goldfinches do.

If bird surveys are a good indicator, opportunities for seeing goldfinches are improving. Abundant agricultural practices, the fragmentation of parts of the forest habitat in the eastern United States, and an increase in bird feeding has increased the goldfinch population and possibly increased its range, according to biologists.

Goldfinches form mating pairs in winter, but nesting does not begin until late June or July, considerably later than other songbirds.

Goldfinches build nests in the forks or cross-branches of a tree, usually between four and 14 feet off the ground. The female builds the nest in four or five days and lays four to six bluish-white eggs. She incubates the eggs for 12 to 14 days. During this time, the male feeds the female on the nest. The young fledge in 11 to 17 days. Because of their late nesting period, goldfinches usually raise only one brood. Occasionally, however, the female will begin a second nesting while the male continues caring for the

first brood.

The American goldfinch is an extremely sociable bird and in winter is found almost exclusively in flocks. During the breeding season, it feeds in small groups.

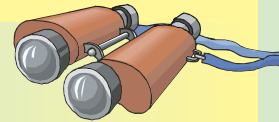
A good way to attract goldfinches to feeders in spring and summer is to use a tube-type feeder filled with niger (thistle) seed, black-oil sunflower seed, or hulled sunflower seed.

Additionally, well-maintained bird baths increase the chances of attracting goldfinches and other songbirds. Birds need water not only for drinking, but also to keep their feathers clean and operable.

Bird baths should be placed somewhere easily visible and close to a water source for easy filling and cleaning. Because they are artificial puddles, shallow is better. Bird baths should be placed four to five feet away from feeders to prevent contamination from debris. They should also be located near trees or shrubs so birds can reach a protected spot to preen and clean after bathing.

For more information on American goldfinches, contact your nearest Missouri Department of Conservation office.

Be a Bird Watcher!



Look....

American goldfinches are year-round residents of Missouri. They prefer weedy fields and floodplain areas as well as cultivated areas, roadsides, orchards and gardens.

They are most frequently seen in spring and early summer when their bright yellow coloring makes them a favorite sighting at birdfeeders and in rural pastures.

...and Listen

The primary call of an American goldfinch is a long series of twittering and warbling notes. Some describe it's call as "per-chic-o-ree" or -- if you want an easy tip for remembering it -- "po-ta-to-chip."