



The distinctive, bright plumage of the male American Goldfinch sets him apart from all the other “common” feeder birds.

His female counterpart has a more demure plumage: olive-yellow head and back, a brighter chest and belly, but the same black wings with a white band, and black tail.



These goldfinches have paired off in May, not ready to breed yet. Notice that the male’s black cap has not fully grown in, but each is mostly in their breeding plumage.

By November there is little distinction between male and female goldfinches. No black caps, no bright, lemony body feathers, no orange bills.



If there's no room on a feeder, goldfinches are not adverse to taking seeds from the ground – or the snow in this case..



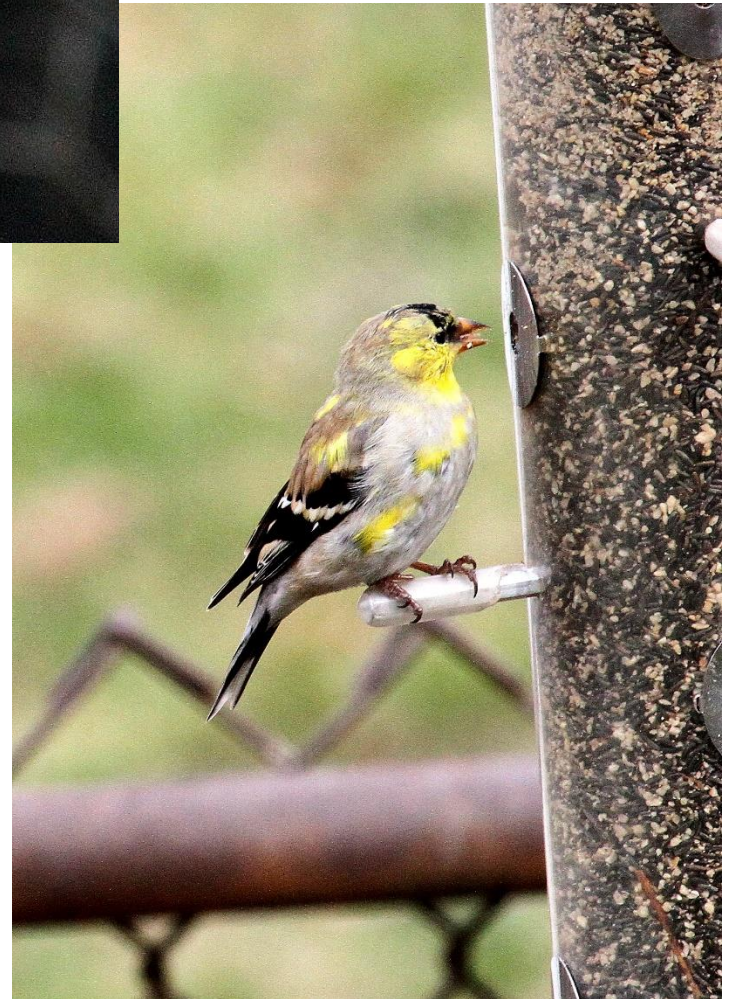
As the snow flies, the little finches band together to find food. House Finches and goldfinches share ports on a feeder in the middle of January 2021.





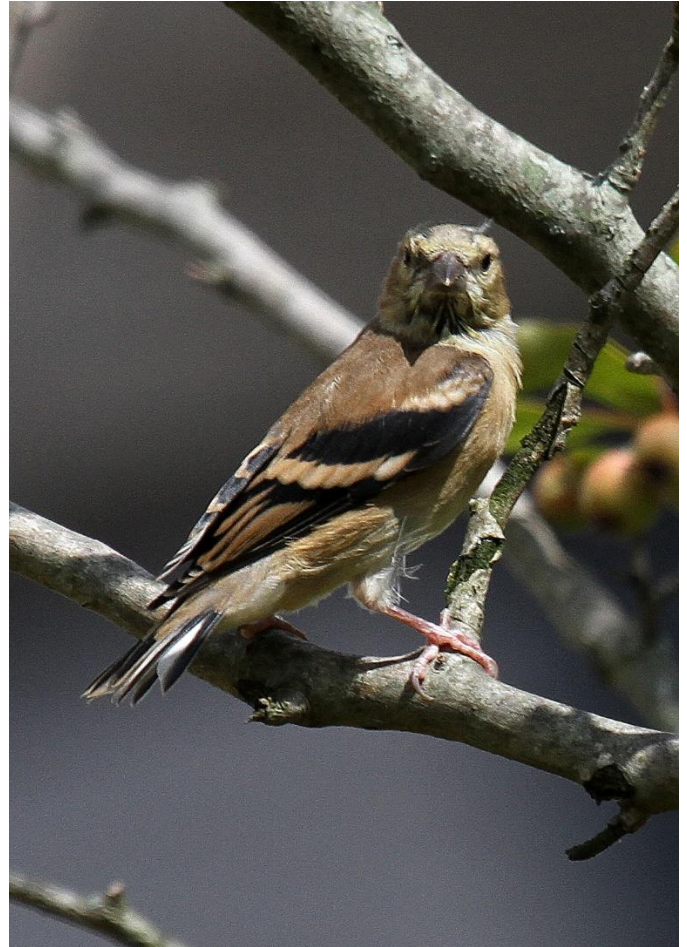
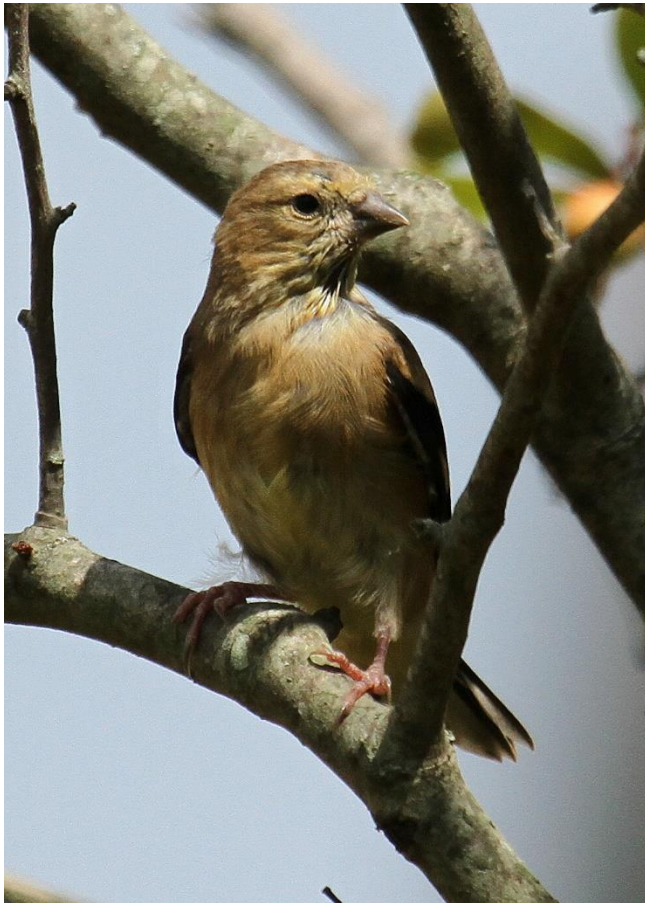
A winter female goldfinch has a olive-brown mantle and head, but her wing feathers and bands are well defined, outlined in white.

Goldfinches molt one feather at a time, giving them a mottled look during their transitional stages. This bird was well along on March 25, 2021.



Males usually begin their spring molt in late March or April. This male forgot to read the guidebooks. He already had a good black cap on January 16, 2023.

A pair of fledglings left the nest in mid-August showing their late year breeding. Note the unkempt feather on this fledgling's head and its stubby tail.



The fledglings have the adult female pattern, but they are brown all over. The beak is also brown, but legs are pink like adults.

This winter female on snow looks very brown too, like the basic fledgling plumage. (Camera angle makes tail look stubby.)

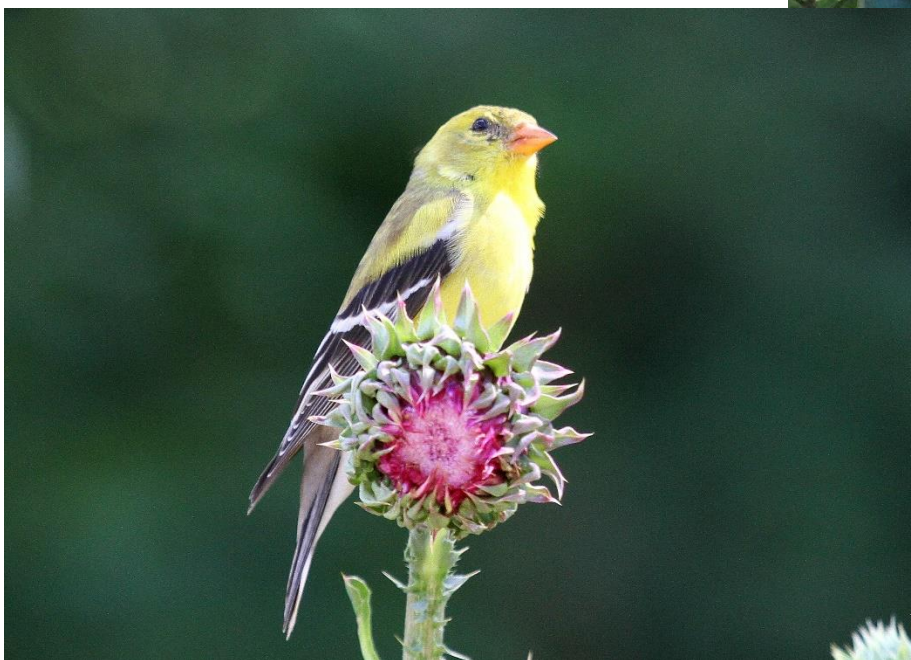




Unfortunately, goldfinches are subject to mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, which is more often carried by House Finches. The eyes are severely affected. Cleaning one's bird feeders is important to prevent spread of this disease



The conjunctivitis in this male was so severe it was blind in its left eye. I took this photo with a phone camera about five feet away. The goldfinch was unaware of my approach so close.



To end on a happier note, here is a healthy male in May sitting on his favorite flower, a milk thistle, just beginning to bloom.

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