

American goldfinch

Spinus tristis

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Passeriformes
Family: Fringillidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

The American goldfinch, also known as the wild canary, is about five inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). From April through mid-September, the male has bright yellow body feathers with black wing and tail feathers and a black head patch. A white rump patch and two, white wing bars are also present. The female in summer has olive-yellow body feathers with black wing feathers and two, white wing bars. In winter, both sexes are similar to the female's summer coloration but with a more gray tint. A short, cone-shaped bill is present on this small bird.

BEHAVIORS

The American goldfinch is a common migrant, summer resident and winter resident throughout Illinois. It may be found in forests, forest edges, fields, shrubby areas, pastures and suburban areas. Migrating birds begin arriving in the state in mid-April. Nesting occurs from June through August in weedy, shrubby areas, usually in small trees. The nest is made of plant fibers and is lined with thistle down. A nest may last for several seasons. The female deposits five or six, pale-blue eggs, which she incubates for the entire 12- to 14-day incubation period. The male brings food to her while she sits on the nest. Fall migrants start their return in September. The goldfinch feeds on seeds, particularly those of the dandelion, sunflower, thistle, birch and sweet gum. It will also capture insects, particularly to feed to the young birds. This bird has an undulating flight and may make call notes at each dip as it flies along. Its song is somewhat like that of the canary.

ILLINOIS RANGE



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winter plumage

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie