

THE COLOURFUL GROSBEAKS

#6 TYPICAL CARDINAL-GROSBEAKS

THE YELLOW GROSBEAK



Photo: Matt MacGillivray

The Yellow Grosbeak, *Pheucticus chrysopleus*, is a medium-sized seed-eating bird in the same family as the Northern Cardinal, "New World" buntings, and "New World" grosbeaks.

The Yellow Grosbeak occurs on the Pacific slope of Mexico from central Sonora to north-western Oaxaca, and in southern Chiapas and Guatemala. In Sonora it is migratory. It occurs mostly in trees in forest, woodland, and edge, but generally not dense rain or cloud forest. Occasional vagrants have reached the United States, mostly in summer in Arizona, but it has also been reported from California, Colorado, New Mexico, and even Iowa.

It is considerably larger than its North American congeners, the Black-headed Grosbeak and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, being 21.5-24cm (8½-9½") in length with an average weight of 62g (2.2oz). The head is huge, and the gray-black bill is large in proportion to the head.

The plumage has bold contrasts of yellow, white, and black and/or grey. The males' head and underparts are solid yellow—light lemon in most populations, The back is black with yellow mottling, the rump is yellow, and the upper-tail coverts are black with white tips. The wings and tail are black with conspicuous white spots, patches, and wing-bars. Females are similar, but the upperparts are more olive, with dark streaking on the crown and back. Grey replaces black, and the white markings on the wings, especially the white base of the primaries, are smaller. Immatures basically resemble the female.

Typical calls are a metallic *iehk* or *plihk* or *piik* and a soft *whoi* or *hu-oi* or *hoee* often given in flight. The song is a variable, rich-toned warble.

As is typical of the genus, it lays 2 to 5 pale bluish to greenish eggs with heavy brown and grey speckling. The cup nest is built at medium height in a bush or small tree.

THE BLACK-THIGHED GROSBEAK

The Black-thighed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus tibialis*, is a large seed-eating bird in the cardinal family, which is endemic to the mountains of Costa Rica and western Panama.

This species breeds from an altitude of about 1000m on the Pacific slope or



Photo: Jerry Oldenettel

from 1500m to 2600m on the Caribbean slope. It is found in canopy, woodland edge and semi-open habitats such as pasture with trees. The nest is a thin cup constructed on a bulky twig base from 1-3m up in a small tree or amongst vines. The normal clutch comprises two brown-spotted pale blue eggs, with the breeding season being between March and May.

The adult Black-thighed Grosbeak is 20cm in length, and weighs 70g. The male has a yellow head, rump and underparts, an olive-edged black back, and black wings, thighs and tail. There is a white patch on the flight feathers. In comparison to the head size the grey bill is massive. The female is paler with more olive on the back and has a smaller white wing-patch. Immatures are duller with an olive tinge, and have streaking and mottling on the body plumage.

The Black-thighed Grosbeak forages in shrubs or trees for insects, seeds and berries. The call is a sharp *pink*, and the song is a musical stream of warbles, whistles, trills and slurs.

THE ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEEK

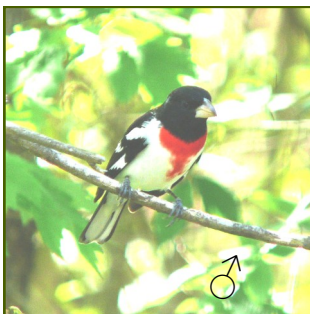


Photo: Ken Thomas

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak, *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, is a large seed-eating bird in the cardinal family, *Cardinalidae*.

The adult is 19cm (7½”) long and weighs 47g (1.7oz). It has dark upperparts, white underparts and a large pale bill. The adult male has a black head, wings and upperparts and a bright rose-red patch on its breast; the wings have white patches and rose-red linings. The adult female has dark grey upperparts, a white stripe over the eye, streaked underparts and yellowish wing linings.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak's breeding habitat is open deciduous woods across most of Canada and the eastern United States. Northern birds migrate to southern Mexico and through Central America to Peru and Venezuela in winter. The species occurs as very rare vagrants to western Europe.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak forages in shrubs or trees for insects, seeds and berries, and also catches insects on the wing. In their winter quarters, they can be attracted into parks, gardens, and possibly even to bird feeders. It builds a twig nest in a tree or large shrub.

The call is a sharp “*pink*”.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia