

## THE EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH

The European Goldfinch or Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) is a small passerine bird of the true finch family *Fringillidae*. Its breeding range extends across Europe, North Africa, western and central Asia, in open, partially wooded lowlands. It is resident in the milder western portion of its range, but migrates from the colder regions. Even in the milder parts of its range it will move around to avoid bad weather. It has been introduced to many areas of the world including Australia and north America.

In Australia the Goldfinch is plentiful in the southern States, and was once found in metropolitan Adelaide in large numbers. But with the increasing density of housing the open spaces on which grew its staple diet of scotch thistle have disappeared, and the Goldfinch has retreated to country areas. Large flocks still occur on the Fleurieu Peninsula, but by far the greater proportion of these birds are infected with the scaly-face mite, which causes large spongy growths to form on their feet.

The Goldfinch is 12-13cm long with a wingspan of 21-25cm, and weighs 14-19 grams. The sexes are similar, with a red face, black and white head, warm brown upperparts, white underparts with buff flanks and breast patches, the wings are black and yellow. However, on closer inspection male Goldfinches can be distinguished by a larger, darker red mask that extends behind the eye, while the red face does not quite reach the eye in the female. The ivory-coloured bill is long and pointed, and the tail is forked. In breeding condition Goldfinches have a white bill, but exhibit a greyish or blackish tip on the beak at other times of the year. The young are known as grey-pates, and have a plain head and a greyer back but are easily identified from similar species by the yellow wing-stripe.

Their food consists of small seeds such as milk and scotch thistles (in fact, their Latin name is from *carduus*, thistle) and in urban areas they readily take the seeds of marigolds and ornamental sunflowers. Insects are also taken when feeding young. They nest in the outer twigs of tall leafy trees, laying four to six blue speckled eggs which hatch in 11-14 days.

In the winter they come together to form large flocks which are called "a charm". Their call is a melodic *tickeLIT*, and the song is a pleasant tinkling medley of trills and twitters.

Goldfinches are attracted to gardens in Europe and North America with specially designed birdfeeders containing niger (pronounced "nyjer") seed. This seed from south Asia is small, black, high in oils, and a favourite of Goldfinches.

Although Goldfinches are commonly kept and bred in captivity around the world for their appearance and pleasant song, they are a flighty bird in an aviary and never seem to really settle down. Goldfinch males are commonly crossed with Canary females to produce male "mules" with beautiful song, that often features the sweetness of the Goldfinch song with the strength of the Canary song.

R.V.C with help from Wikipedia