

THE COLOURFUL GROSBEAKS

The name Grosbeak covers several species of seed-eating passerine birds with large beaks. Although they all belong to the superfamily *Passeroidea*, they are not a natural group but rather an assemblage of distantly related songbirds with certain common characteristics. There are three genera of "typical grosbeak finches", that form a group of close living relatives and can therefore be considered the "true" grosbeaks.

They are the members of the genus *Coccothraustes*:

- Evening Grosbeak, *C. vespertinus*
- Hooded Grosbeak, *C. abeillei*
- European Grosbeak, *C. Coccothraustes*.

Others in the group are:

Grosbeak Bullfinch
Grosbeak Goldfinches
Cardinal-grosbeaks
Grosbeak Tanagers
Grosbeak Weaver.

#1 THE "TRUE" GROSBEAKS

EVENING GROSBEAK



Photo:

US Fish & Wildlife Service

The Evening Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes vespertinus*, is a large finch, being 18.5cm in length. The adult male has a bright yellow forehead and body; a brown head and a large white patch in the wing. The adult female is mainly olive-brown, but greyer on the underparts and also has white wing patches.

They forage in trees and bushes and sometimes on the ground.

Their diet is

mainly seeds, berries and insects. In the non-breeding season they may gather and forage in large flocks.



Photo: "Mdf"



CURRENT RANGE
Map: Alois Staudacher

The Evening Grosbeak's range has expanded far to the east in historical times, this is possibly due to extensive planting of Manitoba, and other, Maples around farms and the wide-spread American practice of providing bird feeders in the winter.

The breeding habitat is coniferous and mixed forest across Canada and the western mountainous areas of the United States and Mexico. It is an extremely rare vagrant to the British Isles, with just two records so far. The nest is built on a horizontal branch or in a fork of a tree.



MANITOBA MAPLE
Acer negundo

Photo: US Department of Agriculture

HOODED GROSBEEK



The Hooded Grosbeak, *Coccothraustes abeillei*, is found in Central America, mostly in Mexico. Males resemble male Evening Grosbeaks but have completely black heads. Females resemble that species as well, but have black caps and lores. They are smaller



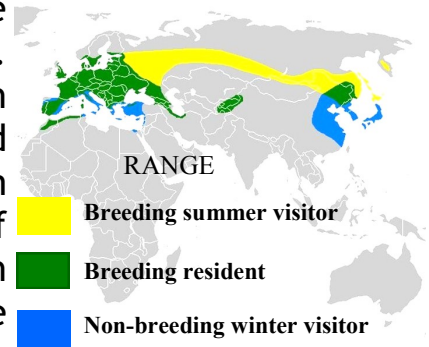
than their northern counterpart and have very different vocalizations.

HAWFINCH



HAWFINCH
C. Coccothraustes
Photo: Frank Drebin

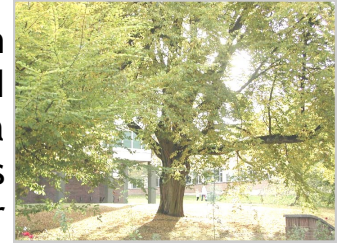
The Hawfinch, *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, is a passerine bird in the finch family Fringillidae. Its closest living relatives are the Evening Grosbeak (*C. vespertinus*) from North America and the Hooded Grosbeak (*C. abeillei*) from Central America. Because of this relationship the Hawfinch is sometimes known as the European Grosbeak.



Map: "Gretaz"

They breed across Europe and temperate Asia. It is mainly a static resident in Europe, but many of the Asian birds migrate south in the winter. It is a rare vagrant to the western islands of Alaska.

Deciduous or mixed woodland, including parkland, with large trees, especially the Hornbeam family, is favoured for breeding. They build in a bush or tree, and lay a clutch of two to seven eggs. Their diet is mainly seeds and fruit kernels, with a particular preference for cherries, cracking the kernels with their powerful beak.



HORNBEAM
Genus *Carpinus*



Photo: Marek Szczepanek

The Hawfinch doesn't form large flocks in the non-breeding season, they are usually seen as pairs or small groups.

They are 16.5-18cm in length and are bulky bull-headed birds, in flight they appear very short-tailed. The head is orange-brown with a black eye-stripe and bib, and a massive bill, which is black in summer but paler in winter. The upperparts are dark brown and the underparts pale orange-brown. The white wing bars and tail tip stand out in flight. Both sexes are similar. They are an unobtrusive bird and are easily overlooked. Their call is a hard "chick". The song is soft and mumbled.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia

Series to be continued