



## Audubon at Home in Northern Virginia

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### American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*)

Common and gregarious, the American Goldfinch is a year-round resident of the Mid-Atlantic Region. Males in spring and summer are bright yellow, the only small songbird with a black cap, black wings and tail. Females are duller, an olive yellow with dusky wings. In winter, males lose their black caps and assume the same dull plumage as females. Both have 2 white wingbars and notched tails. Most of the year, they live in mixed flocks that travel in deeply undulating flight, singing *per-CHICK-o-rec*.

### What American Goldfinches Need

**Food:** Goldfinches are almost exclusively seed eaters, feeding on seeds of birches, alders, conifers, thistle, goldenrod, asters, burdock, dandelion, chicory, etc. They will come to gardens for zinnias, coreopsis, cosmos, coneflowers and sunflowers.

**Breeding:** These birds nest in July and August, later than most other songbirds in the region. Females select nest sites in hedges or forks of sapling hardwoods, 1-33 ft. above ground. The nest is lined with thistledown and milkweed down. Nestlings are raised entirely on seeds, partially digested by adults and regurgitated.

**Shelter:** Females incubate the eggs and will sleep in the nest during breeding season. At other times of year, both the male and female will take shelter in shrubs and leafy canopies of larger trees.

**Other:** Goldfinches frequently use birdbaths and small ponds for drinking. Cats are one of their main predators.

#### Resources:

Plants— available at Nature By Design, Hyla Brook Farm, Merrifield Garden Center, DeBaggio Herbs and other local nurseries

Bird feeders and baths—available at local wild bird stores

Pond liners—available at local home improvement stores

#### Model American Goldfinch Habitats:

Bles Park—[www.loudoun.gov/prcs/parks/other.htm](http://www.loudoun.gov/prcs/parks/other.htm)

Manassas Battlefield Park—[www.nps.gov/mana/naturescience/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/mana/naturescience/index.htm)

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge—[www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=51611](http://www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=51611)

Visit [audubonva.org](http://audubonva.org) for more information and other fact sheets

### How You Can Help

- Plant sunflowers, zinnias, coneflowers, coreopsis, and liatris in your garden.
- Add wildflowers in an open, sunny area. Consider goldenrod, ironweed, black-eyed Susan, cup plant, evening primrose and Joe Pye weed, which produce seeds Goldfinches love.
- Provide feeders with sunflower and nyjer (thistle) seed. Feeders should be placed 6-10 ft. from tree or shrub cover so birds can see and quickly escape approaching predators.
- Plant mid-sized trees such as birch, alder, dogwood, small willows, and serviceberry.
- Add butterflyweed, common and swamp milkweed to the garden to provide nest material
- Plant large shade trees or conifers and/or fairly dense shrubbery for roosting and shelter from bad weather.
- Provide a birdbath or small pond with fresh, clean water.
- Keep cats indoors.