

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) at Toronto: Ontario's First Record

by
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On the morning of 10 August 1982, while conducting a shorebird census on the Eastern Headland, Toronto, York R.M., I observed a small *Carduelis* finch on the edge of an exposed mudflat. I initially considered the bird to be a female American Goldfinch (*C. tristis*), since large flocks frequent the area in late summer. The bird was drinking water and as it was facing away from me, allowed approach to within approximately 10 m. Upon closer inspection, I noted several plumage features which ran counter to my original identification and strongly suggested that the bird was a female Lesser Goldfinch (*C. psaltria*). The following description was obtained:

The crown, nape, back and upper tail coverts were a uniform greenish-grey to olive-green in colour. No white was visible on either the rump or undertail coverts. At rest the bird displayed black primaries and secondaries with two indistinct buff-white wingbars. The tail was all black with the exception of two distinct white crescents on the inner webs of

the outer rectrices. These white crescents did not extend to either the base or tip of the tail. The entire underparts from the base of the bill to the undertail-coverts were a uniform canary-yellow tinted with an olive wash on the flanks. The bill and legs were dark pink, the iris black.

After approximately 30 seconds of careful scrutiny, my presence was detected and the bird flushed and disappeared over a dense copse of sandbar willows (*Salix interior*) and eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*). For the brief period that the bird was viewed in flight, the wings displayed a conspicuous flash of white. It also flew in the undulating manner characteristic of *Carduelis* finches. No call note was uttered, nor was any other vocalization heard during the period of observation.

Subsequent investigation failed to relocate the bird. A report was submitted to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) which, after due consideration, was accepted as the first record for the Province of Ontario (James 1983). At that time it was not

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granted inclusion to the Ontario checklist pending the acceptance of a second report for this species. As a result of changes to the OBRC's criteria for acceptance of a single report sight record, Lesser Goldfinch was officially added to the provincial checklist in 1984 (Wormington and James 1984).

Two subspecies of Lesser Goldfinch are recognized, the green-backed form, subspecies *hesperophilus*, and the black-backed form, nominate *psaltria* (A.O.U. 1957). Differences in back colour are manifested in male birds; females of both forms are indistinguishable in the field. The

species is resident from southwestern Washington, northern California, northern Colorado, northwestern Oklahoma and central Texas south through Mexico and Central America to Columbia, Venezuela and Peru (A.O.U. 1983; Fig. 1). Green-backed males are typically found in the western portion of the range, from southern Oregon and Utah to southern California, Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, while those from Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas are usually of the black-backed form (Bent 1968). Throughout much of its range, the Lesser Goldfinch is sedentary, although

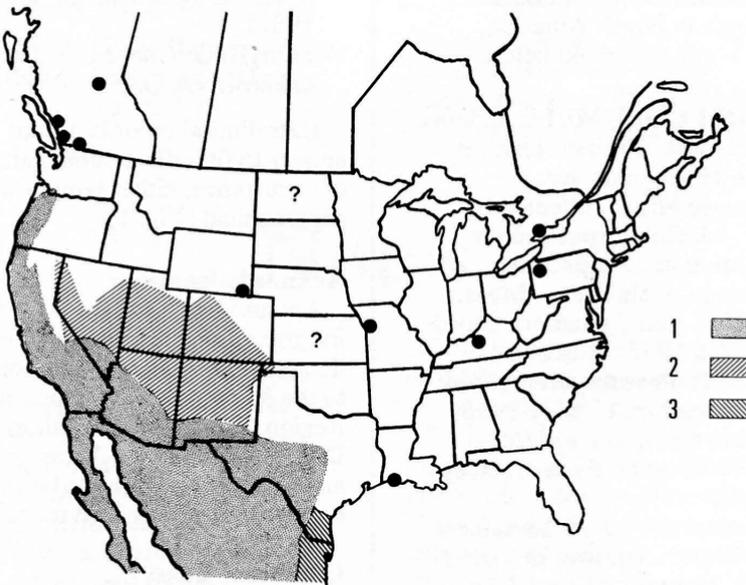


Figure 1. Breeding and wintering ranges of the subspecies of the Lesser Goldfinch in North America. 1. Year-round range of *C.p. hesperophilus*, 2. Breeding range of *C.p. psaltria*, and 3. Winter range of *C.p. psaltria*. Extralimital records are indicated with solid dots, except where specific locations are not known(?).

the eastern form is quite extensively migratory. In all likelihood the Toronto bird is referable to nominate *psaltria*.

According to Linsdale (1957) this species wanders widely in search of food. Since their diet consists mainly of buds and developing fruits, birds apparently require large amounts of water to facilitate the ingestion of seeds. As a result, they concentrate at streams and springs. That the Toronto bird was observed drinking water is all the more noteworthy, in light of the species' oft described penchant for engaging in this activity (Woods 1925; Linsdale 1957).

There are at least 12 extralimital records of Lesser Goldfinch in North America. These are summarized below:

BRITISH COLUMBIA: Indian-point Lake, Cariboo Dist., 9 June 1931, male ssp. *hesperophilus*, collected by T. T. McCabe, specimen in Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.; 1st B.C. and Canadian record (Brooks 1942; Dickinson 1953; R. Paynter, *pers. comm.*) : Huntingdon, 17 May 1958, female ssp. *hesperophilus*, collected by K. Racey (Racey 1958).
: Vancouver, 15-16 September 1983, sex unknown, observed by B. Kautesk, H. and J. Mackenzie (Hunn and Mattocks 1984).
: Sechelt, 22-23 October 1983, sex unknown, observed by T. Greenfield and K. Angermeyer (Hunn and Mattocks 1984).

KANSAS: Location and date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

KENTUCKY: Elizabethtown, 5-7 December 1980, male ssp. *psaltria*, photographed at feeder (Peterjohn 1981).

LOUISIANA: Cameron Parish, 17 April 1954, female collected by J. Gee (Lowery 1955).

MISSOURI: Kansas City, date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

NORTH DAKOTA: Location and date unknown (Stewart 1970).

ONTARIO: Toronto, 10 August 1982, adult female observed by D.M. Fraser, 1st Ontario record (James 1983).

PENNSYLVANIA: Meadville, 3 February 1982, sex unknown, observed by S. Flaugh (Hall 1982).

WYOMING: Cheyenne, date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

Extralimital records do not appear to fit a discernible pattern of occurrence, either temporal or geographical (Fig. 1).

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Eds. Comment: One aspect of *Ontario Birds* with which we, as Editors, are disappointed is the Notes section. We would like to see more Notes submitted to *Ontario Birds*. Notes make an important contribution to provincial ornithology, are relatively easy to write and are usually very interesting—often more so than longer articles. In this issue's Guest Editorial, Martin McNicholl, the author of dozens of notes, has commented on their value. We would like to try to further

stimulate our readers to contribute to the Notes section. Toward this end we will be designating a "Topic of Note" for each of the three issues of *Ontario Birds* in 1985. The Topic of Note will be a bird related subject which we hope will help our members focus their attention on a specific topic when trying to recall or when searching their field notes for a particular observation. As well, the Topic of Note will be a subject such that members can go out into the field looking for observational material.