Notes

may be a learned or culturally transmitted behavior that occurs sporadically in time and place.

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LITERATURE CITED


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Paired American Goldfinches from Jefferson County, Florida in June.—On 20 June 1987 I saw a male and female, apparently paired, American Goldfinches (Carduelis tristis) in northwestern Jefferson County, Florida. I was walking along a railroad right-of-way that crosses Ward's Creek, a large, dense swamp. At about 09:10 hr, a small, bright yellow bird flew across the right-of-way and perched conspicuously in a short tree; through binoculars (8x40), I saw a brilliant definitive alternate-plumaged male American Goldfinch at 10 m in full sunlight. The bird preened a short time and then flew down to perch on a dead stalk of last year's dogfennel (Eupatorium compositifolium). When I approached, the goldfinch flew away down the railway and was joined in flight by another bird its size; they flew side-by-side about 4 m off the ground and about 2 m apart with a deeply undulating flight. After going about 40 m, the pair veered off and perched in the open. Upon my approach I concentrated on the second bird and saw it was a female goldfinch. The female lacked the bright color and black cap of the male but was obviously of the same species: it had the same morphology, with a yellow breast, an olive-yellow back, and black wings and tail. The female was brighter than the winter birds I am used to seeing and, overall, seemed slightly more greenish than usually illustrated. Together, the birds dropped down
onto another dead stalk of dogfennel and then down to green growth to forage. Again my approach startled them to fly away down the track. This time one of them gave twice the familiar “potato chip” flight call that I have heard from this species on hundreds of occasions during the winters of the last 25 years. Although I revisited the site on 21 and 24 June, and on 19 July, I did not see or hear them again.

The American Goldfinch is considered only a winter resident in Florida. Although on rare occasions individuals have been recorded from Florida in summer, some at feeders (Stevenson 1986, pers. comm.), the appearance of a pair in breeding plumage, habitat, and season is unprecedented. The species often breeds in wet, shrubby habitats similar to that in which I saw the birds (Tyler 1968, Hamel et al. 1982). The species is a late nester, even in the south of its range: Georgia egg dates range from 19 June to 31 July (Burleigh 1958). Thus it is possible that this pair of goldfinches was searching for a breeding site when I saw them. Tyler (1968) and Imhof (1976) commented on the importance of thistles (Carduus sp.) that are used for food and nesting material; no thistles were apparent where I saw the goldfinches. Although the southern limit of the primary breeding range for American Goldfinch is about 150 km to the north of Florida, the species has been reported in the breeding season from Lowndes County, Georgia (Haney et al. 1986) and Houston County, Alabama (Imhof 1976); both Lowndes and Houston counties are adjacent to Florida.

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Literature Cited


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