

Pine Grosbeak

Pinicola enucleator

Finches of the family *Fringillidae* are multicolored seedeaters with buoyant and undulating flight. Many species nest in the far north at high elevations. The word finch, derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "*finc*," is possibly an imitation of their song. As their name implies, Pine Grosbeaks are finches with heavy, rounded bills and an affinity for evergreen forests (*Pinicola enucleator* means "pine-dwelling seed-remover")!

Usually wary and unapproachable, the Pine Grosbeak inhabits open, coniferous spruce-woodlands and mixed deciduous-needle leaf stands. Although sedate and inconspicuous, they prefer to perch at the very tops of spruce and aspen trees. Large (23cm), fluffy, long-tailed and round-headed, these grosbeaks are reminiscent of robins in their size and shape. Breeding males are gray overall and tipped with red on the head, breast, wings and back, although fresh fall plumage is pinker. Female and immature birds are duller and grayer, with the head, rump and belly and breast in varying shades of yellow to orange. In all birds, two bold, white wing bars, sometimes tinged in pink, strongly contrast with the dark wings. In addition, the thin, pale-gray eyebrows that arc over the eyes along with the short, dark lines extending from behind the eyes give these birds a "squinting" expression. Look for their colorful plumage, slow wing beats and bounding flight to identify these grosbeaks at a distance!

Often singing during undulating flight, the soft song of the Pine Grosbeak is a low, lazy warble. Composed of quiet, metallic, whistles, "fillip, illy, dilly, didalidoo," the song has a descending trend. On the fly, the call is a high but weakly whistled "pui, pui, pui." Their alarm call is a musical "chee-vli."

Pine Grosbeaks build their nests in coniferous trees and shrubs. Loosely constructed, the bulky nests are made of mosses, twigs, grasses, and lichen. Soft mosses, lichen, fur, and fine grasses and rootlets line the cup-shaped nests. The clutch consists of 2-5, 26mm, bluish-green eggs, entirely speckled in purples, browns and black.

The female alone incubates the clutch for 13-15 days. Although the male feeds her while she is on the nest, the female is known to repeatedly leave the nest to forage. In 13-20 days after hatching, the young birds fledge (learn to fly) and are cared for by both parents. Amazingly, the parents develop buccal pouches, openings from the floor of the mouth, in order to carry food to the nestlings.

Pine Grosbeaks hop along the ground gleaning a variety food items; seeds of coniferous and deciduous trees, seeds of forbs, insects, buds and also fruit. In winter, they forage in small flocks of 5-30 birds, occasionally with Bohemian Waxwings.

The Pine Grosbeak winters in North America and sporadically wanders in search of food. In summer, they occur in the far north from interior Alaska across northern Canada eastward to Newfoundland.