



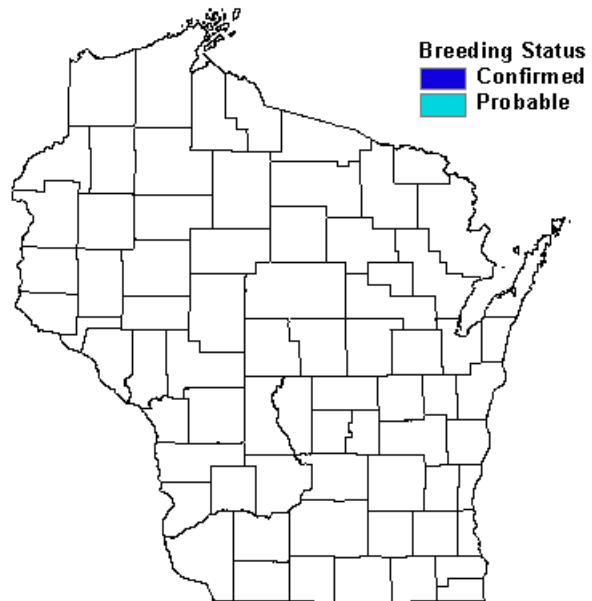
Species Survey Strategies

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II

Recently Introduced European Songbirds



Kevin DeBoer



European Goldfinch

WBBA I Breeding Range

European Goldfinch is an introduced species in North America. It is a popular cage bird, and sightings throughout the country are usually pet birds escaped from captivity. It was not recorded during the first atlas, but since then, there have been many reports in Wisconsin, particularly the southeast. These birds are thought to have originated from birds deliberately released by an importer based in northern Illinois. The species has been reported nesting in Wisconsin since at least 2006, and these released birds appear to be establishing themselves, so we are particularly interested in getting an update on the breeding status of this species.

European Goldfinches are often found in duos and small groups, especially from fall through winter. They will associate with American Goldfinches, House Finches, sparrows, and other small seed-eating species, especially at backyard feeders.

Region: Recorded from over 30 counties, including nearly all in the southern third of the state. However, most records are from far eastern counties, usually from Sheyboan south. The bulk of the population and nearly all nesting activity has been noted from Racine, Kenosha, and Walworth counties.

Racine County apparently has the highest population, and it is concentrated around the Caledonia/Mt. Pleasant/Sturtevant area, especially Mt. Pleasant. In Kenosha County, this species is most often found west of city limits, especially around Pleasant Prairie. In Walworth County, sightings have been mostly in Delavan, Elkhorn, and Walworth south to the state line (many releases are thought to have taken place outside Harvard, Illinois). [eBird Range Map](#)

Time of Year: European Goldfinches can be found in Wisconsin year round. They nest much earlier in the season than American Goldfinches. In the southern part of the state, they may begin frequent singing in late March, and begin gathering nesting material in early April, but as late as early June. Independent young (often with adults, but not being fed by them) have been seen as early as 30 May, and fledging probably occurs from late May to mid-June. This species is known to have two broods in its native range.

Breeding Guideline Bar Chart: (Full chart is on [atlas handbook webpage](#))

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
N N N N	N N N N	N N N N	E E E E	E E B B	B B B B	E E E E	E E E E	N N N N	N N N N	N N N N	N N N N

N = Nonbreeding Season, **M** = Migration, **B** = Breeding Season, **E** = Either (a transition period)

Time of Day: No special instructions. As with many birds, early morning hours are usually best.

Focal Habitat: In general, European Goldfinches favor similar habitats to American Goldfinches, such as open, weedy fields in suburban and ex-urban areas. Many reports from this region seem to indicate that they prefer areas within 0.5 km of water, including small ponds, creeks, and rivers. In their native range, most nests are found in various fruit trees, whereas the admittedly limited data on nests and nest building activities here appear to center around conifers, particularly pines. Small groups of 2 to 9 pairs may nest close together. In their native range, European Goldfinches require a nearby (usually within 150 m) source of partially ripe seeds, often plants in the daisy (composite) family, to feed the young. Presumably dandelions are an important food source for feeding young, especially early in the season.

Special Methods: None. Ensure urban and suburban areas within your block are covered.

Code Guidance: None.

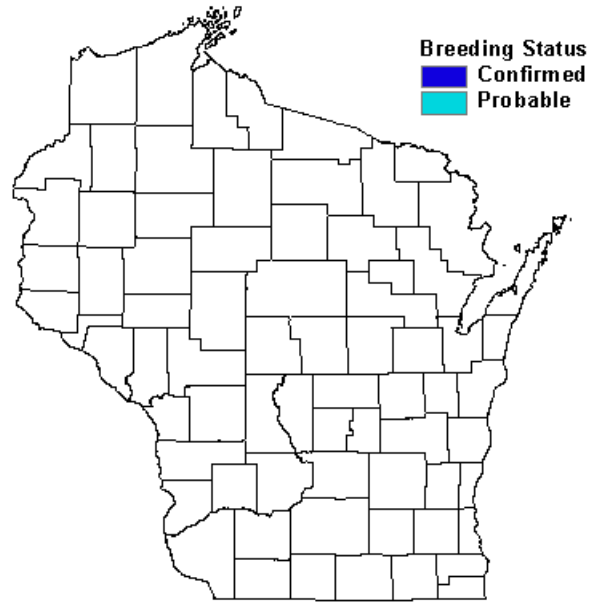
Other Species: Additional escaped cage birds that may be nesting in the state include Great Tit (see next account). Other birds of conservation interest in urban landscapes include aerial insectivores: Chimney Swift, Common Nighthawk, and Purple Martin.

Confusing Species: Adult European Goldfinches distinctive, though and females can be difficult to tell apart without a close view; the red mask in the male typically [extends just past the upper rear of the eye](#). Juveniles could be confused with American Goldfinch or Pine Siskin. [Juvenile European Goldfinches](#) lack any color or pattern on the head, but have the bold yellow, black, and white wing pattern of the adults. A [“gray-headed” form](#) has been reported sporadically in the region, although there are no reports of nesting or young birds.

Thanks to Julie Craves of [Rouge River Bird Observatory](#) for helping us with this account.



Jody Zamirowski



Great Tit

WBBA I Breeding Range

Great Tits were thought to be part of the same cagebird release in the Chicago area. This is another species that appears to be establishing itself. They were not found during the first atlas, but since then have been confirmed nesting, beginning in Milwaukee in 2004. Since then they have been seen in counties fronting the Lake Michigan shoreline all the way up to Door, although their primary concentration seems to be from Sheboygan south. There are relatively few nesting records, so any breeding activity should be investigated.

Region: Primarily southeast Wisconsin, especially along the Lake Michigan shore between Racine and Sheboygan. [eBird Range Map](#)

Time of Year: Great Tits can be found in Wisconsin year round. Their breeding chronology is not well known in our area, but the birds in Milwaukee moved about as a pair by mid-March and were seen feeding young in early June.

Breeding Guideline Bar Chart: (Full chart is on [atlas handbook webpage](#))

January				February				March				April				May				June				July				August				September				October				November				December			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	E	E	E	E	E	E	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	E	E	E	E	E	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

N = Nonbreeding Season, **M** = Migration, **B** = Breeding Season, **E** = Either (a transition period)

Time of Day: No special instructions. As with many birds, early morning hours are usually best.

Focal Habitat: Related to chickadees, they will use mixed woodlands, parks, and suburban backyards. They are a cavity nester. Many observations have been near human habitation.

Special Methods: None. Ensure urban and suburban areas within your block are covered.

Code Guidance: None.

Other Species: Other birds of conservation interest in urban landscapes include aerial insectivores: Chimney Swift, Common Nighthawk, and Purple Martin.

Confusing Species: The primary confusion species is Black-capped Chickadee, but [even juvenile Great Tits](#) have a yellow wash underneath and a black line running down the center of the breast.

Other Species

We know that releases from the Chicago area have involved a number of European songbirds. Unlike European Goldfinch and Great Tit, the status and breeding status of these species in southeast Wisconsin is uncertain. We are not aware of any concentrations of these species, but it is worth raising awareness of them. Any suspected breeding during the atlas period should be investigated.

Eurasian Blue Tit



Francis Franklin

Eurasian Siskin (compare Pine Siskin, females are very similar)



Slawek Staszczuk

European Greenfinch



Andreas Trepte

Common Chaffinch



Charles J. Sharp

Eurasian Linnet



Joe Pell

Eurasian Jay



Luc Viatour