



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### July 1, 2022



Photo by Jenn Guess

### A Picky Eater

Lesser Goldfinches are small, short-billed songbirds with relatively long wings and a short tail. Adult males are bright yellow and black, whereas females and young birds have more muted yellow and dark tones. There is no color differentiation between the sexes in juvenile goldfinch. Males and females can be distinguished when they reach sexual maturity, which is between 7-12 months. Goldfinches can be found in a variety of habitats including forests, mountain canyons, suburbs and in flocks of over 100 when food is plentiful.

Lesser Goldfinches are monogamous during the breeding season. The males will claim a territory and attract a mate with their songs. When a female is interested, the two birds will perch on the same branch and perform a courtship display. The female will pick a nest site, about four to eight feet off the ground, in a protected area of a tree. She will lay up to six eggs and incubate them for almost two weeks. During this time the male will feed the female. Once the eggs hatch the babies will stay in the nest for an additional two weeks. When they are fully feathered and mobile, the young birds will leave the nest and spend another week on the ground while they learn how to fly. Both parents will feed their offspring until the juveniles are able to fly and find food on their own.

In the wild, Lesser Goldfinches will eat a variety of foods, with the majority of their diet consisting of seeds. They will also consume some berries, flower buds, and occasionally insects. While at CWC we do our best to mimic the natural diet of every species, but sometimes an animal will be a picky eater. That was the case with a fledgling goldfinch that was recently admitted with an injury to their right wrist. The patient was also missing multiple feathers on their right wing, body, and all of the tail feathers. Although we don't know definitively what caused these issues, we suspect that the bird was caught by a cat.

Once at CWC, the fledgling was administered pain medication, anti-inflammatories, and antibiotics. Their wounds were cleaned and dressed, and they were set up in a small enclosure. Since the goldfinch was old enough to eat on their own, we offered them our finch diet (which consists of a variety of seeds plus greens and berries), but the patient was not very interested in the selection. Staff knew they needed to quickly figure out what the goldfinch preferred to eat. Small songbirds have a very fast metabolism and will rapidly need supportive care if they do not consume enough calories each day. A goldfinch will consume about half of their body weight a day while healing from an injury.

We offered the Lesser Goldfinch a wide variety of foods, sectioned out into different piles. That way we could easily tell what items the patient preferred to eat. It was also important to not mix the foods since an animal might dislike a certain item and then could refuse to eat the other options that are in contact with the unfavorable food.



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Once the goldfinch was provided a more varied diet the staff was able to see that they liked thistle and sunflower seeds. The patient still ate some of the standard finch diet, but the majority of their caloric intake came from the supplemental foods. The Lesser Goldfinch is currently in our ICU, gaining weight, and continuing to heal from their injuries. We expect the patient to move into an outdoor enclosure in about a week and then hopefully be ready for release within a month.

If you find an injured songbird, gently place them in a box with airholes and keep them in a warm, quiet, dark location. Contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center as soon as possible for next steps.