

## Welcomed Color in Winter

**I THINK OF FALL AS THE TIME OF LBBS** (little brown birds). Many of the small migrating birds are in their fall/winter dull plumage, making them hard to identify quickly. The Lesser Goldfinch (LG) is somewhat easier to pick out than a LBB. The LG is a tiny, stocky member of the finch family, four and a half inches long, with a wingspan of eight inches. They are found in the southwestern U.S. with varying hues. The New Mexico (NM) birds are pale compared to the adult male in Texas, but you might spot a very bright yellow male here. Males have a greenish gray back, pale wingbars, a pale yellow breast and stomach, some pale gray on the head and a short, dark gray bill. Females are duller. In flight, males may show a white patch on the wing when seen from above or below.

I often see them in small groups in the fall, making short bounding flights from one side of the road to the other. They are fun to watch along the roadside, where they acrobatically hang upside down and sideways on our Common Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus* L.), pecking seeds from the flower. They are in NM during the summer, migrating to Central America and the northern edge of South America. Some birds may stay in southern NM during winter months. During the winter they may join flocks of up to 400 birds, which include Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches.

LG build a small cuplike nest in a tree and the female lays four to six eggs. The female incubates them for 10 to 12 days, and the altricial young (who



appear almost naked with a little down and their eyes closed) fledge in approximately 11 to 17 days. Females feed the young the first four or five days. Then both male and female feed the young a regurgitant of milky seed pulp. Adult diet consists of seeds, forbs, grasses, floral buds and berries. The male courts with spread wings and tail, flapping to the female, and may offer seed to the female.

A more spectacular version of the same bird we see resides south of Mexico City, where the males have black heads and backs and bright yellow throats and stomachs.

—Pam Henline