

## Black-headed Grosbeak (BhG)



The Black-headed Grosbeak is a chunky bird, 8.25 inches long, with a wingspan of 12.5 inches and a very thick bill. The breeding male has a black head and black back; the top of his wings is black with a large white patch, and his under-wing is yellow, with black on the wing edges and with a large white spot. His tail is black with white sides, and his chest, neck, and back are bright orange. The female is drab brown and has a white eye stripe, light brown-gray chest, and dark brown wings and tail. The female may appear a light yellow on the chest. The BhG is resident in Eldorado during the summer. The male is very bright and at first glance may appear to be an oriole. The adult breeding plumage comes when the bird is two years old. The female may be easily confused with other backyard birds. The BhG is found through the Western states in summer, and winters mostly in central Mexico.

BhGs can be found around thickets, open woodlands, backyards, and gardens. It prefers large trees over coniferous vegetation. The male courts the fe-

male by flying above her, displaying his colorful underside. The female builds a bulky nest of sticks in a tree in a few days. The BhG is difficult to flush from the nest—staying quiet to protect the eggs/chicks. Three or four eggs are laid by the monogamous pair (monogamy lasting just one season). Both male and female tend the egg and chicks. Hatching takes place in 12 to 13 days. The helpless young are ready to leave the nest in 12 to 14 days but may not be able to fly for several more days. Diet consists of seeds (especially in winter), bugs, spiders, and buds. It is one of the few birds that can safely eat the poisonous monarch butterfly.

Both males and females sing: a pleasant series of ascending and descending notes, ending with a “chink.”

In the central plains, the BhG hybridizes with the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, creating some difficulty in identifying individuals. The population of the BhGs seems to be stable. A group of grosbeaks are collectively known as a “gross” of grosbeaks.

—Pam Henline