

# Black-headed Grosbeak

*Pheucticus melanocephalus*

In western North America, the sweet song of the Black-headed Grosbeak caroling down from the treetops sounds like a tipsy robin welcoming spring. The flashy black, white, and cinnamon males and the less flamboyant females sing from perches in suburbs, desert thickets, and mountain forests. At feeders they effortlessly shuck sunflower seeds with their heavy bills. The showy male puts in equal time on the domestic front: both sexes sit on the eggs, feed the young, and feistily defend their nesting territory.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

Black-headed Grosbeaks are hefty songbirds with very large bills that are conical and thick at the base. They have large heads and short, thick necks. A short tail imparts a compact, chunky look.

### Color Pattern

Breeding males are rich orange-cinnamon with a black head and black-and-white wings. Females and immature males are brown above with warm orange or buff on the breast, and some have streaks on the sides of the breast. All have grayish bills. In flight, they flash bright yellow under the wings.

### Behavior

Often hidden as they hop about in dense foliage gleaning insects and seeds, Black-headed Grosbeaks feed readily on sunflower seeds at feeders. Males sing in a rich, whistled lilt from treetops in spring and summer. The short, squeaky chip note is distinctive and can be a good way to find these birds.

### Habitat

Look for Black-headed Grosbeaks in mixed woodlands and edges from mountain forests to thickets along desert streams to backyards and gardens. Ideal habitat includes some large trees and a diverse understory. across North America, including estuaries, marshes, streams, lakes, and reservoirs.

## Measurements

### Both Sexes

- Length - 7.1 - 7.5 inches
- Wingspan - 12.6 inches
- Weight - 1.2 - 1.7 ounces

