

## **First record of Oriental Greenfinch (*Chloris sinica*) for British Columbia and Canada.**

**By Rick Toochin**

### **Introduction and Distribution**

The Oriental Greenfinch, also called Grey-capped Greenfinch (*Chloris sinica*), is found in eastern Asia from southern Russia south to central Vietnam (Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2012). Its range includes the southern and central part of the Kamchatka Peninsula, The Kuril Islands to Sakhalin, the entire Korean Peninsula, Japan, and central, eastern and southern China (Brazil 2009). There are five subspecies of Oriental Greenfinch found within the birds range (Brazil 2009). These subspecies are resident within their range, except the subspecies (*C. s. kawarahiba*) that migrates between the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Kuril Islands to Sakhalin Island (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2012). This subspecies is casual in the outer Aleutian Islands and is accidental at Adak Island and St Paul in the Pribilof Islands in Alaska (Beadle and Rising 2006, West 2008, Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is only one historical record south of Alaska; a bird that was seen from December 4, 1986-April 3, 1987 in Arcata, California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). Though the record was photographed and well documented the California Rare Bird Records Committee (CRBRC) did not accept the record because of questions of the bird's origin (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). An extensive search by the CRBRC in 2005 found a total of 8 known Oriental Greenfinches kept in captivity throughout North America (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). It is always a possibility that this bird was an escapee, but given the pattern of vagrancy demonstrated by other Asiatic birds that have turned up in western Alaska and along the West Coast of North America, this species might be found again in the future. There are no records for Washington State or Oregon (Wahl *et al.* 2005, OFO 2012, WBRC 2012). The only other record of Oriental Greenfinch south of Alaska is of a bird found and photographed on May 27, 2009 at Francois Lake, outside Burns Lake in Northern British Columbia (J. Bowling Pers. Comm.). Given the scarcity of records away from the outer Aleutian Islands and south of Alaska, it might take many decades before another greenfinch will be found in British Columbia or anywhere along the West Coast of North America.

### **Identification and Similar Species**

Oriental Greenfinches are small birds that are only a bit larger than a Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) or Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*) (Roberson 1980, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). All ages of Oriental Greenfinch have an extensive yellow patch on the wings which is formed by yellow bases to the primaries and they also have broad yellow patches at the sides of the tail (Roberson 1980, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This gives Oriental Greenfinch a look that is superficial similarity to Pine Siskin which shares the yellow in both the wings and tail (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). A major difference is that the yellow on Oriental Greenfinch is much more prominent and on sitting birds looks like a yellow patch (Roberson 1980). The males are olive-

green on the head with a dark patch that encompasses the dark eyes (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The nape is grey and the upper parts are a dark olive-brown color, while the under parts are a paler olive-brown (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The under tail coverts on Oriental Greenfinch are distinctly yellow (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Females are browner bodied and have olive tones mostly restricted to the head (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Immatures are browner like the females, but are more heavily streaked below and on the sides of the breast (Roberson 1980, Brazil 2009). In all plumages the bill is large and pale pink in color, and the yellow coloration on the wings and tail is distinctive (Roberson 1980). Oriental Greenfinches have a very obvious call that is a nasal “*djeeeen, djuweee or dzweee*” (Brazil 2009). Their preferred habitats in eastern Asia are mixed coniferous forests, and deciduous forests near agricultural lands in the summer, with birds preferring woodland forest edge, riverine scrub, agricultural land, and gardens in the winter months (Brazil 2009).

One important species to rule out from any potential sighting of an Oriental Green finch is European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*). European Greenfinch is a species that is kept in captivity in North America and has been found in the past in both the United States and Canada (Godfrey 1986). This species is superficially similar looking to Oriental Greenfinch but does have some important plumage differences. Adult male European Greenfinches have paler grey on the head with limited black on the face at the base of the bill (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The bill is large and pink in coloration (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The throat of the adult males is yellow and the breast is yellow-green down the flanks (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The under tail coverts are white in coloration (Jonsson 1992). On the back and rump adult male European Greenfinches are light green in color (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The wings in flight have yellow at the shafts of the primaries but this is not a dark thick line as found in Oriental Greenfinch (Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The tail is dark except for yellow that cuts into the base of the tail feathers (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). Adult female European Greenfinches are browner on the back and have more grey streaked on the breast and flanks (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). Female greenfinches have less yellow in the wings and tail (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). Immature birds are paler overall in body coloration and are white breasted with grey breast streaks (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). European Greenfinch and Oriental Greenfinch are similar in overall body size (Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). In all plumages European Greenfinch lacks the dark brown back, sides and flanks seen on all Oriental Greenfinches (Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The calls of the European Greenfinch is a short loud “*jupp*”, that is often repeated in a fast series often becoming short trills “*jup-up-up*” (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). European Greenfinches can also give a loud, upcurled “*juit*” call note (Mullarney *et al.* 2009) No confusion should be made by observers in the identification of European Greenfinch from Oriental Greenfinch in the context of a bird found anywhere in North America or in British Columbia.

There are a few superficially similar looking eastern Asian species to Oriental Greenfinch. The Eurasian Siskin (*Spinus spinus*) has a similar wing and tail pattern to Oriental Greenfinch and has occurred in Alaska a couple of times (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In male siskins the crown is black with black on the chin below the bill (Brazil 2009). The face is yellow with a black line from the bill to the dark eye (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Eurasian Siskin is green on the back and has black wings with two large yellow wing bars that are quite extensive on an open wing (Brazil 2009). The rump is yellow and green on males and the tail has extensive yellow on the inner side of the tail feathers (Brazil 2009). The underside of the bird is yellow on the upper chest and white on the belly and flanks with light side streaks (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Female siskins are yellower in the face and lack the black of the males but otherwise have similar plumage characteristics (Brazil 2009). Immatures are pale-faced and pale-breasted with streaks below (Brazil 2009). The upper parts are similar to adult birds (Brazil 2009). Outside of the wing and tail pattern showing extensive yellow, Eurasian Siskin is very different to Oriental Greenfinch and should be easily ruled out by any observer. In the context of British Columbia this species could turn up but there are no records outside of Attu Island in the outer Aleutian Islands and its occurrence in British Columbia would appear to be very remote (West 2008, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The Eurasian Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) is a commonly kept cage-bird with no accepted vagrant records in North America; though escaped birds are found on occasion (Beadle and Rising 2006). Eurasian Goldfinches are very small in overall body size (Jonsson 1992). Adults share the Oriental Greenfinches extensive yellow wing patch but little else about this species is similar (Jonsson 1992, Beadle and Rising 2006, Brazil 2009). Adults have red on the face with black lores, a large pale bill, pale grey-white head, neck, body and flanks (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). They have black wings and a black tail with white edges in the central part of the tail feathers (Jonsson 1992) (Brazil 2009). The rump of the Eurasian Goldfinch is white (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). Immature birds are browner backed, pale faced and buffy and streaked on the breast (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). At any age this species is very different to an Oriental Greenfinch and outside of the wing and tail pattern would be easily distinguished (Jonsson 1992, Beadle and Rising 2006, Brazil 2009).

In the context of North America and British Columbia the only bird that has a similar wing and tail pattern is Pine Siskin. Pine Siskins share a similar yellow wing stripe and yellow tail base to Oriental Greenfinch but that is where the similarities end (Sibley 2000). Pine Siskins can be distinguished from Oriental Greenfinch by their body coloration (Sibley 2000). Pine Siskins have a pale streaky breast, and pale streaky back which lack any brown tones (Sibley 2000). Pine Siskins also have a darkish bill and the yellow in the wings is made up of two wing bars (Sibley

2000). However there can be variation in the amount of yellow in the wing and some birds can show extensive amounts of yellow (Beadle and Rising 2006). However even with extra extensive yellow on the wings, Pine Siskins are very differently plumaged to Oriental Greenfinches and overall the two are not likely to be confused for each other (Beadle and Rising 2006). The calls given by Pine Siskins are totally different to Oriental Greenfinch with Pine Siskin giving a rising “tee-ee” on sitting birds and a harsh descending “chee” flight call (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

On May 27, 2009 while watching his bird feeders Keith Walker noticed an odd bird in his yard. After taking several photographs he sent the images to the Prince George online bird chat group where the bird was identified as an Oriental Greenfinch (J. Bowling Pers. Comm.). The bird appears to be a first year male based on the photographs that were taken by Mr. Walker (J. Bowling Pers. Comm.). It is impossible to know if this bird escaped from captivity but it seems highly unlikely given the remote location it was found. It was also found at a time of year when Oriental Greenfinch’s are known to migrate to their northern breeding grounds, and though well inland from the Coast the bird was at the correct latitude for the time of year it was found (Roberson 1980, Beadle and Rising 2006). In Alaska, Oriental Greenfinch is a rare, but regularly occurring migrant species with at least 18 records for the State since the first in 1976 (Roberson 1980, Beadle and Rising 2006, West 2009). Most birds occur on the outer Aleutian Islands predominantly as late spring migrants (late May – June) but there are also a few fall records (August -September) with almost all the records confined to the Islands of Attu, Buldir and Shemya (Roberson 1980, Beadle and Rising 2006, West 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Additional Alaska records include one bird that was observed from June 12-16, 1996 on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs and a couple of recent records on Adak Island (Beadle and Rising 2006, West 2008). Occurrence in the outer Aleutian Islands is most likely the result of large storms that cause birds to overshoot the breeding areas on the Kamchatka Peninsula (Roberson 1980). Many birds have been seen in the outer Aleutian Islands in small flocks but others have been seen as single birds (Roberson 1980). Despite their somewhat regular occurrence, Oriental Greenfinch has not turned up in mainland Alaska, making their occurrence in North America very limited in area (Beadle and Rising 2006). Though other species that occur regularly in the Aleutian Islands like Rustic Bunting and Brambling seem to have a pattern of occurrence south of Alaska, Oriental Greenfinch has not yet developed any such pattern (Beadle and Rising 2006). It is very important to photo document all future records to help elucidate any vagrancy trends that may become apparent. Unless a pattern of vagrancy develops, the origin of the Francois Lake bird will remain unknown. Hopefully future records will show that this bird fits a larger west coast pattern of vagrancy.



Figures 1-2: Record #1: Oriental Greenfinch 1st year male at Francois Lake, near Burns Lake on May 27, 2009. Photos © Keith Walker.



Figures 3-4: Record #1: Oriental Greenfinch 1<sup>st</sup> year male at Francois Lake, near Burns Lake on May 27, 2009. Photos © Keith Walker.

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