

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Pine Grosbeak

POST #11—December 9, 2021

Much of the biodiversity in the Sax-Zim Bog is only visible during the spring and summer months. However, there are a few species that are only around for the winter. With the new snow and winter weather in the Sax-Zim Bog, let's consider one of those species: Pine Grosbeak!

Pine Grosbeaks are one of the largest finches in the world and can be found in northern boreal and montane forests around the globe. In Sweden, they are colloquially known as "silly fools" due to their friendly and vociferous demeanor. It is true that Pine Grosbeaks are quite an approachable bird during the winter, though they can be a little cautious when coming to feeders early in the winter season at the Welcome Center.

As their name suggests, Pine Grosbeaks are often found in and around conifers. They have diverse diets that include conifer seeds and fruit from trees like mountain-ash. If they have enough food on their breeding grounds, they are content to stay north all winter. However, in years where food is scarce they (like many

northern finches) will irrupt south of their normal range. In the Sax-Zim Bog, we will generally see some Pine Grosbeaks during the winters, even outside of irruption years. In fact, Pine Grosbeak has only been missed on one occasion during Christmas Bird Counts in the Sax-Zim Bog in its 30+ year history.

Quite a colorful species, Pine Grosbeaks offer contrast to an often bleak winter landscape. Male Pine Grosbeaks are often a rosy-pink from head to toe, with female and first year birds being a soft gray overall with golden-yellow accents on their heads and rumps. Young males usually can be separated from female birds, as they have rustier head and rump plumage. All ages and sexes of Pine Grosbeaks have two white wing bars.

Check for these wonderful finches at feeders around the Sax-Zim Bog or in mixed forest with good seed crops (with trees like birch, aspen, and spruce). Don't wait too long to look for them in the Bog, however: Pine Grosbeaks begin heading north in the first couple of weeks in March and are usually gone from the area by March 15th!

More information about these birds included in the photos below!

(Photos below by Sparky Stensaas)



Adult male Pine Grosbeaks are a beautiful bird! As distinct as they are, this bird sometimes gets confused with the similarly plumaged White-winged Crossbill. Pine Grosbeaks are much larger, have a longer tail, and a stubbier bill than White-winged Crossbill.



Adult female Pine Grosbeaks may not be as flashy as males, but are superb! Their golden-yellow tones are quite distinct.



Young finches are notoriously difficult to sex in the field. The same can be said for most Pine Grosbeaks, but young males generally show rufous tones on their heads, rumps, and sometimes chests like this bird does. Though variable, female Pine Grosbeaks usually don't show the same level of rufous in their plumage.



Though primarily seen at seed feeders in the Sax-Zim Bog and beyond, Pine Grosbeaks love mountain-ash berries! Look for them in urban areas with abundant mountain-ash, where they will associate with other winter frugivores (fruit eaters) like Bohemian Waxwing, American Robin, and even Townsend's Solitaire!



This handsome orange variant male Pine Grosbeak visited the Welcome Center feeders a couple of winters ago! Well outside of the normal plumage variation for male Pine Grosbeaks, he was a wonderful bird to observe!