

▶▶▶ FEATURED PLANT

Trees of Southeastern Arizona, Coronado RC&D Area, Inc. and Conservation Districts of Southeastern Arizona

Common Name: Foothill paloverde

Scientific Name: *Parkinsonia microphylla*

Foothill paloverde is a long-lived large shrub or small tree with a height of 12 to 25 feet. The bark is yellow green. Foothill paloverde flowers in late April and May. Flowers have 5 pale yellow petals, often the largest petal (banner) is white or cream-colored. Seed pods are rounded, pointed at the tip and mature to a light brown with constrictions between the seeds. Leaves are bipinnately compound with one pair of pinnae on a very short rachis. Four to eight pairs of very small leaflets are attached to each pinnae. Stems are yellow green, grow in a zigzag manner, and taper to a spiny tip. It is also called littleleaf paloverde or yellow paloverde due to its very little leaves and when in blossom the flowers are bright yellow.

As the name implies, foothill paloverde is found on rocky slopes in foothills of desert mountains; it also occurs on gravelly flats and plains and sometimes along washes. Foothill paloverde occurs throughout much of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona, southeastern California, Baja California and Sonora, Mexico at elevations from 500 to 4000 feet.

The paloverde is the primary nurse plant for young saguaro cactus. Native Americans eat the seeds fresh from the pods and grind the seeds into flour or meal. Seeds and seedlings are also utilized as food by many small rodents and rabbits. Bees and other insects are attracted to the flowers. Flowers and twigs are browsed by livestock and wildlife.



▶▶▶ FEATURED BIRD

Dan L. Fischer - Author of Early Southwest Ornithologists, 1728-1900, University of Arizona Press

Common Name: Lesser Goldfinch

Scientific Name: *Carduelis psaltria*

Lesser Goldfinches are the smallest, most common and widespread of the four *Carduelis* finches that occur in Arizona. The American and Lawrence's are generally considered uncommon or erratic with few nesting records within the state. The fourth in the genus is the Pine Siskin, a common small bird frequenting tall coniferous forests of the higher mountains, especially during the breeding season.

Lesser Goldfinches might hardly be noticed except for several distinctive attributes that bring them into focus. Only four inches in length, they are gregarious and assemble in small groups that easily aids in locating them. Although the birds residing in Arizona have a dark greenish back (differing from south Texas birds with blackish backs), the males are endowed with a bright yellow breast, as their common name implies, that is often quite brilliant in sunlight. When taking flight, especially in a flock, the bright white patches of their darker wings are very noticeable.

Often heard before being observed, Lesser Goldfinches are songsters, producing a lovely series of sweet twitters and trills that are quite

distinct. They are also capable of including in their repertoire many imitations of other species. While in the field, Thomas Say, the discoverer, noted its song and later when describing the species applied the Greek name *psaltria* meaning "a lutist" for its vocal qualities.

Lesser Goldfinches are generally found near riparian locations of deciduous trees where water is available and also in most established residential areas. The abundance of seeds and buds from trees and various wild flowers, especially composites are a favored diet. Not a ground dweller, they secure these food sources directly from the plants while they are still attached. They have a strong preference for thistles where the birds actively group and engage in ripping apart the maturing flower heads. They also feed on tiny insects.

Attacks by aerial predators on these tiny Lesser Goldfinches and their nests are quite frequent. They must always be vigilant and when pursued often manage to escape by diving into a dense bush when available. Some attackers such as the Loggerhead Shrike often plunge into the brush after them, but the older finches are sometimes able to quickly flee and



then out-manuever their attackers through aerial skills by twisting and turning or sharply flying upward in tight circles to gain a safe distance.

Lesser Goldfinches nest through the summer months and usually lay 4 or 5 very pale blue or greenish eggs in a small nest, usually in a fork well hidden in dense foliage. Incubation and nest building is done by the female. Incubation is about 12 days and the young depart in a similar period. Both parents feed by regurgitation.

Say made the discovery of the Lesser Goldfinch with his assistant Titian R. Peale while on the Major Stephen H. Long Expedition along the Arkansas River to the Rocky Mountains in 1819-20.