

White Winged Crossbills



Male White Winged Crossbill



Close-up Of Crossed Bill



Female White Winged Crossbill

A gem of the northern woods, white-winged crossbills often first appear as a bounding, chattering flock moving between spruce and tamarack trees. Flocks fly around the treetops, sometimes hanging upside down like parrots, while young crossbills spend most of the time prying open spruce cones with their twisted bills.

Being in flocks allows crossbills to enjoy the benefits of having more eyes to watch for predators. When they do come down to the ground, they gather grit, small pieces of dirt and rock, to aid in digesting their food or to feed on fallen cones. They also eat insects during the summer. One bird can eat up to 3,000 seeds from cones each day.

White winged crossbills are a compact, medium sized finch with a slightly forked tail and heavy crossed bill. That means the top and bottom bill are not even, but are crooked, allowing them to pry open the pine cones to get to the seeds. They are 5.9-6.7 inches long with a wingspan of 10.2-11.0 inches. The adult males are rose-pink with black wings and tail and two white stripes on their wings. Females are yellowish with the same wing and tail pattern.

Both the males and females select the nest site together, usually in a spruce tree. The female builds the nest with material brought to her by the male. She will lay 2-4 eggs and incubate (sit on them) for 14-16 days until they hatch. The eggs are bluish green with white and dark spots. Once the babies are born, the male alone cares for the young while the female may go off to have another brood in another tree. They can nest year round, often in late winter when food is plentiful. Like owls, they nest in cold weather. **Here in Racine County, they do not nest, but are seen during spring migration in April and during winter migration in October and November.**

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