

THE WILD SIDE by Dave Gibson

REDPOLL INVASION



Common redpolls are a small grayish-brown finch that spend their summer months in subarctic forests and scrub tundra. Their name comes from the bright red cap or “poll” on its head.

Supremely adapted against the cold, redpolls can survive in temperatures down to 89 degrees below zero Fahrenheit and will sometimes burrow in the snow to keep warm. In a pocket inside its esophagus they are able to store food, for consumption at its leisure, while sitting out blizzards.

Approximately every two years northern bird species migrate further south than in other years. Occurring simultaneously in North America and Europe, it is known as an irruption and happens when there is seed crop failure in boreal forests. White birch seeds are a particular favorite of common redpolls and this year’s output was reported as poor to fair. Because of this we are experiencing a mass influx of the finch. Always on the southern edge of their winter range, Colorado has recently recorded sightings in and around La Veta and Lamar. In 2007 the first redpoll was spotted in New Mexico. In December of 2012 they have been seen there as well as Southwestern Kansas.

*Dave Gibson is a photographer & writer focusing on the natural world around us.
His imagery and previous articles can be found on his web site at www.davegibsonimages.com*