

Ornithology, the Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the XIX International Ornithological Congress in Ottawa. Awards include a Radcliffe Traveling Fellowship to paint birds of Amazonian Brazil, and International Council for Bird Preservation and Sigma Xi stipends. Julie can be reached at Indigo Hill, Route 1, Box 270, Whipple, OH 45788.

## AT A GLANCE *October 1994* \_\_\_\_\_ *Wayne R. Petersen*

The mystery photo for October actually includes several birds. However, the largest of the several pictured birds is the intended mystery bird; the smaller, streaked individuals are Purple Finches. This knowledge provides a clue because it gives the reader a size comparison, seldom enjoyed on this page, of characteristically ambiguous photographs.

The mystery bird's obviously robust size and its thick, conical, seed-cracking bill suggest that it is probably a member of either the Subfamily Cardinalinae or the Family Fringillidae. The first of these two groups includes cardinals, grosbeaks, and allies, while the other comprises finches and allies. Knowing that many of the Fringillids are typically small and short-tailed (e.g., redpolls and siskins) or lack an obvious eyebrow stripe (e.g., Pine Grosbeak), the only possible candidate in this group is the Evening Grosbeak. Although the male Evening Grosbeak has a yellow eyebrow stripe and forehead, it also has an extensive white wing patch, not white wing bars, and does not have a streaked back.

By elimination, it would appear that the hefty seed-eater in the photograph must be a member of the Cardinalinae. Because the bird does not have a crest and possesses wing bars, it cannot be a Northern Cardinal, while its large size compared with that of the adjacent Purple Finches removes the Dickcissel and all of the buntings as possibilities. This leaves only the three species of grosbeaks that have occurred in Massachusetts.

The prominent white wing bars and the bold eyebrow stripe at once leave the Blue Grosbeak out of the running. Because the bird does not show a solid black head and upper chest, it cannot be an adult male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, while a female of that species would be heavily streaked on the breast and flanks. Instead, the relatively unstreaked underparts, especially across the midbreast, and the blackness of the primaries all clearly indicate that the pictured bird is an immature male Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) in its first autumn plumage.

In Massachusetts the Black-headed Grosbeak is a rare visitor from the West that most often appears in fall and winter and occasionally visits feeding stations, such as the bird pictured in the October issue is doing.

## AT A GLANCE

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Photo by Hal H. Harrison, Courtesy of MAS



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