

A Black-headed Grosbeak in Attala County, Mississippi

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There is no need for any word description of the Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*), the subject of this report, for the excellent photograph of this bird taken by Ray Weeks and appearing below speaks for itself.



This individual, a male, first appeared here at Piney Woods Farm (Attala Co., Mississippi) on 10 January 1977 and was last seen here on 8 February 1977. The bird was apparently attracted to the chopped yellow corn that I had tossed onto the roof of a small outbuilding. Here the grosbeak joined Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) and various native sparrows in eating this corn. I would sometimes have sunflower seeds mixed with the chopped corn, but I never noticed the grosbeak eating anything but the corn. He would sometimes also fly to the ground and eat corn that I had sprinkled there for my chickens.

For the first 10 days or so after his arrival here he was seen often and regularly about these acres, but after this he appeared less frequently. The bird behaved as a rather typical grosbeak, being tame and proceeding with his feeding in a slow, deliberate manner. Often, after feeding, he

would sit quietly in some nearby tree.

The other birds here showed him no special notice, nor did he exhibit any discernible reaction to them. They mingled together while feeding.

We do have a few previous records of the Black-headed Grosbeak in Mississippi, but to my knowledge this is the only photograph taken of the species in our state.

The Black-headed Grosbeak is a western species, normally ranging from the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific and from British Columbia to Saskatchewan and south to Mexico. The species winters mainly in Mexico.

The occurrence of this Black-headed Grosbeak this far east at this season of the year is unusual; some of us suspect that its arrival here was aided by the extremely strong and persistently prevailing westerlies, unusual for our latitude, that we have experienced all winter.

Reviews

A Guide to Bird Finding East of the Mississippi, Second Edition. By Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. Oxford University Press, New York, New York, 1977: 689 pp., black-and-white drawings by George Miksch Sutton. \$15.95 (hardcover).

As a young bird-watcher, aside from my field guide, there was one book which made my hobby more pleasurable and which always had the answer when I visited a new area and wanted to find new birds. That book was "A Guide to Bird Finding East of the Mississippi", which had been published in 1951. I never ceased to be amazed at the accuracy with which Pettingill's directions would lead me to the bird I sought - and I was using the book in the 1960's, over ten years after it had been written. Now the guide has been revised and brought up to date. As with the first edition, "A Guide to Bird Finding" is a series of chapters organized by state and arranged alphabetically. The section on each state first describes the physiographic regions of the state and the kinds of birds to be found in each. Often there is a brief comment on the state of ornithological knowledge of the area. The general comments are followed by several guides to specific, good birding sites within the state. These site guides tell you what can be found where and when it will be there. Directions for getting to a particular place are very easy to follow. Sewall credits the accuracy and clarity of these directions to his "pilot" and wife, Eleanor. Doc Sutton's line drawings add a fine touch to the book. I was particularly pleased to find his Red-cockaded Woodpecker drawing on the page for Starkville, Mississippi. Bird-finders in Mississippi will find the 17 page chapter on our state to be very useful. Site guides are included for Biloxi (and the Gulf Islands), Clarksdale (Moon Lake), Greenville (Lake Washington, Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge), Gulfport (Harrison Experimental Forest), Iuka (Tishomingo State Park), Jackson