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EASTERN EVENING GROSBEEK SUMMER RECORDS*

Part I

SURVEY OF NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW ENGLAND AND NEW YORK, 1954 AND 1955

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The Eastern Evening Grosbeak, *Hesperiphona v. vespertina*, has, during the last few years, become such a common winter visitor that the initial excitement of observing these colorful and noisy birds has all but died down; however, the interest in summer nesting records with more and more reports farther south each year is causing not a little stir among ornithological investigators. In a previous paper in *Bird-banding* (25:87-95, July, 1954) the author attempted to draw together all reported records of nesting or observations of Evening Grosbeaks during the summer months, up to and including 1953. With additional records since then, it seems appropriate to tabulate these data for 1954 and 1955.

NEW BRUNSWICK 1954

Although the Plaster Rock area and several points along the Little Tobique River to the north and northeast did not report Evening Grosbeaks during the summer of 1954, there was a concentration of interest in this species in the Green River watershed in northwestern New Brunswick. D. S. MacDougall, who was associated with the Green River Laboratory with headquarters at Summit Depot, made extensive observations during the summer and offered the following report:

"The Green River Laboratory itself is the center of a project currently involved in the study of the spruce budworm (*Choristoneura fumiferana* (clem)) and is located in the far northwest corner of New Brunswick. The forest types here are largely boreal and Laurentian, the former in the more northern areas, the latter in the southern. A certain amount of bird survey work is carried on for this project and the Evening Grosbeak comes under our legal jurisdiction in this respect. The Evening Grosbeak has attracted a growing amount of interest due to its sudden increase in breeding numbers in areas under spruce budworm attack, both in New Brunswick and Ontario. . . .

*Contribution No. 18 from the Shaub Ornithological Research Station.

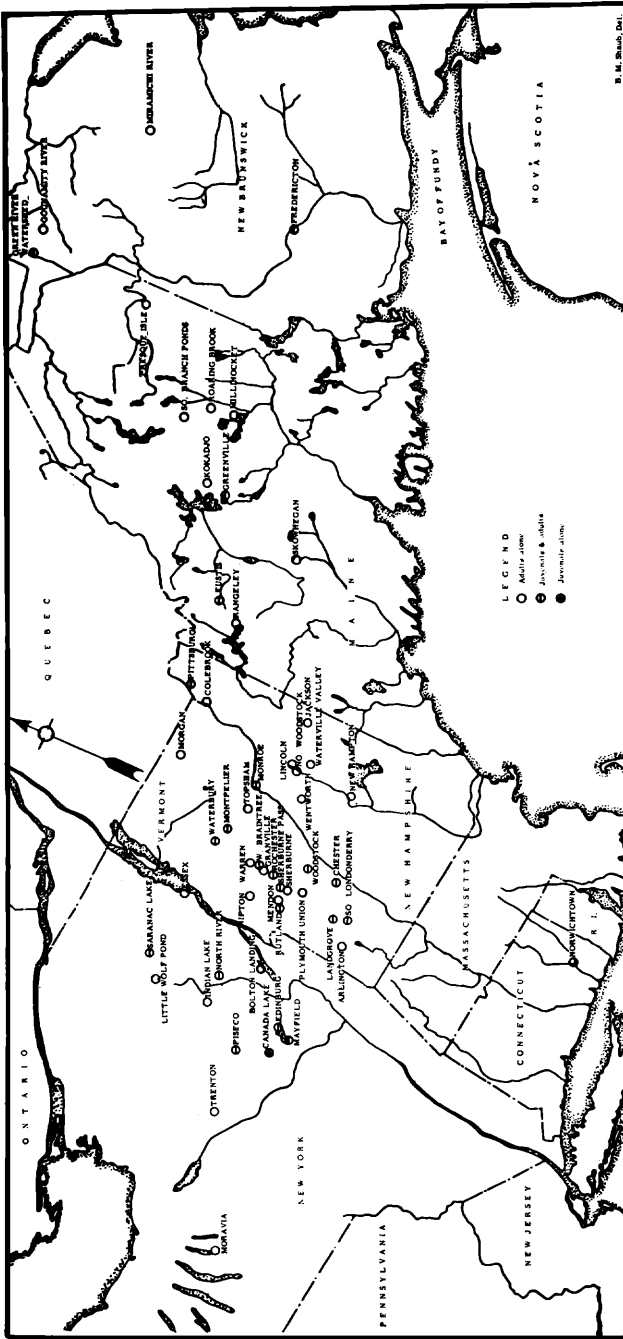


Fig. 1. Map of Northeastern United States and part of the Maritime Provinces showing summer observations of adult and juvenile Evening Grosbeaks during 1954 and 1955.

"Spring arrivals began on April 25 but no grosbeaks were sighted until May 8, when two males and four females were seen near our laboratory buildings. From that date until May 26 the numbers present in this vicinity ranged from two to eight or ten, usually in flocks predominantly female with occasional paired birds in evidence. However, after May 20 their flocks were of a more even sex ratio, and were evident all over the Green River watershed taking in an area of 250 square miles.

"On May 26 a large flock of about twenty in number appeared with a sex ratio of 50:50 and more continued to arrive daily with a slow build-up in numbers until there were between 26 and 30 by June 10th.

"Sometime between June 12 and 16 female attendance at our feeding location stopped completely and not until June 27 was there evidence of any females returning, and then only in very small numbers compared with the males. Small flocks up to eight or ten birds were the only evidence of the presence of the species for almost a month after the reappearance of the females, and then with very mixed ratios.

"On July 29 the first juvenal was recorded, a little unsteady on the wing, but accomplished enough to carry on good steady flight. From this day on activity around our laboratory buildings grew until there were so many small groups with from 3 to 10 birds flying around that it was next to impossible to get an estimate of their numbers.

"From the first of August activity was quite steady at a high level except when interrupted by bad weather. The noise they made here was almost annoying at times, their quavering calls coming from every major point of the compass during the peak period of the day. During these active hours, usually from dawn to midday or sometimes later, the birds were very nervous and seemed very excited, never remaining in one place for any length of time. This period of great activity and excitement corresponded with the appearance of the young and continued until the birds began to disappear about the middle of August. Young were seen being fed pin cherries by the adults as late as August 10 although all birds were strong fliers from August 1 on in my estimation.

"After August 16 their numbers began to decline slowly, calling died down, and what flocks were still around seemed larger in size. By August 25 the numbers here were negligible and August 27 was the last record for the summer. Insofar as sightings were recorded daily previously, I believe it can be taken for granted they had left their breeding grounds in this area.

"Mr. D. G. Mott has done a considerable amount of flying this year in connection with the spruce budworm, at the 300-500-foot level, and he reports that the Evening Grosbeak was evident over much of this northwestern sector of New Brunswick. This, along with a number of ground records, suggests that the Evening Grosbeak is heavily distributed over the entire area. On a one-day trip to the headwaters of the *Miramichi River* in central New Brunswick (July) we recorded several grosbeaks, which suggests their breeding range extends eastward at least to that area. How far south from there is a question.

"Their large breeding range in New Brunswick is quite significant in that the first summer record for this vicinity was in 1951, only three years ago, when the appearance of one bird, a banded one at that,

caused quite a flurry of interest here. This corresponds quite well with the growth of the spruce budworm infestation in this area. Whether there is a coincidence or a connection between the two is open to question.

"Information as to the Evening Grosbeak's natural food is rather scanty. I saw them feeding in balsam foliage at a period when the buds had just burst their coverings in early spring, but what they were feeding on I do not know (I assume it was the buds). During May and early June they fed largely on the ground, along dirt roads and in Pin Cherry groves, but I could find not the slightest sign of anything edible after chasing them off. Minerals must form a large part of their diet. Our feeding location here was kept attractive in the spring by salt and suet, but after mating was largely over their desire for salt stopped, July 27 being the last date on which they were seen feeding at our location. (It was a beautiful sight during the period when the only visitors were males, to see a flock of 15 or more packed closely together, feeding on the salt. When they were startled they would rise as a body in a flurry of white wings and brownish-yellow bodies, to perch in nearby trees until the source of disturbance had passed on.)

"To give another example of minerals in their diet, while on a trip to the *Gounamity River* in July we noticed a number of Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches and Pine Siskins acting very suspiciously around the ruins of an old mill. On examining the ruins more carefully, suspecting nests, we found nothing which would be a source of attraction to these three finches, except, possibly, a great pile of fine, fine soot beneath the rusted boilers. Through a process of elimination Mr. Mott and I arrived at the conclusion that this must be the big attraction, although it is not founded on fact by any means. What surprised me was the boldness and apparent annoyance shown by all three species of birds. While sitting in the darkness on the soot beneath the boilers several birds flew within several inches of my face, but there were absolutely no nests there.

"The Evening Grosbeaks began to feed on pin cherries in the vicinity of August 6 when the cherries began to redden. During this period their closest associates were Cedar Waxwings. The sound of snapping seeds from the cherry groves was a day-long occurrence between the two species. While observing Evening Grosbeaks closely one day, I noticed their curious method of eating pin cherries. The cherry is plucked off, pushed through the beak from one side to the other, the pulp, skin and juice squeezed out one side, and the seed itself kept in, to be broken with a sharp snap before swallowing.

"I have found by trying to plot Evening Grosbeak nesting areas or ranges on a map that these are quite extensive, and that the birds may travel long distances in flocks to feed in clearings."

MAINE, 1954

At Big Lyford Pond, *Kodadjo*, Maine, Mrs. Ivan Sherman observed Evening Grosbeaks in the summers of 1950, 1952 and 1953. By June 28, 1954 she had seen a male often near the camp and several times observed two pairs of grosbeaks until the middle of June. A male was noted several times during the first two weeks of July. Mrs. Bernice Young

had a large flock of Evening Grosbeaks start feeding about the middle of May in *Greenville*. The flock varied from 6 to 50 birds and remained until the first week of June. Later in the summer they brought their young to the feeder although the juvenals were nearly as large as the parents. They would sit on the edge of the box while the older bird would crack sunflower seeds open and feed the meat to the juvenal. They remained up to the first of August when a squirrel began to bother the birds and apparently frightened them away. At *Presque Isle* the Evening Grosbeak was reported as a summer resident by Glen Chamberlain. Around the 18th of August Mrs. Axel Tibbetts observed a large flock of males and females at *Rangeley* but the birds were noted for only a week. On August 9th Mrs. Merle Scott recorded one pair of Evening Grosbeaks that remained for a half hour at the *South Branch Ponds Campsite* north of Mt. Katahdin but were not seen again that summer.

NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1954

Between July 1st and August 30th a number of localities in New Hampshire reported Evening Grosbeaks: *Colebrook*, August 5th, 20 birds reported by Katherine C. Dickson; on July 1st one male and two females were seen at *Jackson* by Rachel R. Doucette; at *Monroe*, Mrs. Earl D. Hunt saw one male on August 22nd and heard another bird; on the 24th she observed a pair and three which must have been grown young and one young fluttered its wings to be fed but neither adult fed it. The adults were noted eating chokecherries and black cherries and were seen also on the following day. On August 26th a male and two young were observed. On August 30th two grosbeaks were observed in an open field near *New Hampton* by Mrs. Richard Hebert. At *North Woodstock* 50 birds were noted a number of times from August 15th by Madeline Carter. On July 19th a pair was seen by the Danforths at *Pittsburg* and on July 20th eight were recorded from the same locality by A. and N. Scott. At *Waterville Valley* eight were seen on August 19th and five on the 27th by Miss Sarah J. Woodward; and in August a male grosbeak was identified at *Wentworth* by Kathleen McDade.

VERMONT, 1954

A great deal of activity was reported from this state. On August 14th Herbert Congdon saw one male in *Arlington* and a farmer near-by reported that three had been around all summer. During the summer there was evidence that possibly two pairs were nesting near *Chester* and on July 11th and 12th two adult males brought three juvenals to the feeder of Henry F. Crocker. George W. Davis, Vermont Fish and Game Director, saw several grosbeaks at *Granville* in June. Mrs. Edwin Brooks estimated that five pairs were nesting in *Landgrove* and later brought their young to the feeders. In June Evening Grosbeaks were reported from *Plymouth Union* and later in the month G. W. Davis saw the species at *Ripton*. In July it was reported that an adult was seen feeding a young bird on the lawn of Herbert Allen in *Rochester* (fide Downs). On July 11th Miss Elizabeth Ball saw two males, one female and one probably immature feeding on tamaracks near her house in *Rutland*. Maurice Broun reported that two families of Evening

Grosbeaks were recorded in June and early July at the Bates Farm in *Sherburne*. On June 11th T. S. Fillebrown saw a pair of adult grosbeaks in *Sherburne*, and on July 11th Elizabeth L. Gillingham observed two adults and two young birds in a tree near the Long Trail Lodge at *Sherburne Pass*. The summer records for *South Londonderry* are given in detail in Part II of this paper. Mrs. James Downs observed two males and two females four miles south of *Waterbury* on June 8th and on the same day she saw two males and one female just outside *Warren* where the Evening Grosbeaks had also been reported in June. About June 1st grosbeaks were noted in the road in *West Braintree* by Mrs. John H. Dumas, apparently eating salt in the dirt. Flocks of 40 to 50 were seen during the summer and later young birds were observed at this locality.

NEW YORK, 1954

From *Bolton Landing* Mrs. Mildred A. Barber wrote that Evening Grosbeaks were seen daily after April 8th and by June 18th at least six pairs were eating sunflower seeds on her front doorsteps. On July 12th Dr. Malcolm McMartin noted a young Evening Grosbeak on a lawn between *Canada Lake* and *Fulton Lake*. Mrs. Raymond Mills wrote from *Edinburg* on July 14th, "A few days ago I heard three and then saw a pair of the birds busily feeding their insistent young pin cherries — not sunflower seeds that we had on the feeding stations. The young have a 'where' sound when they beg for food, so unlike any other birds' young I know. We are on the Sacandaga Reservoir, an artificial lake about the size of Lake George. The birds are still here after several days — seven birds at least." Although Evening Grosbeaks did not frequent the feeders of Mrs. Lindsay McPhail at *Indian Lake*, she did hear and see the species from time to time towards the end of June resting in the tops of the pine trees near her cottage. At *Little Wolf Pond* which is located north of the town of Tupper Lake P. Paquette noted one male on July 4th. Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald reported Evening Grosbeaks all summer long at *Mayfield* and young being fed were observed by Mr. Hallenbeck. At *North River* Mrs. Emma Rogers recorded a family of Evening Grosbeaks, parents and three young in early June and two birds in August. From *Piseco* Robert Christie, Jr., writes, "In late June and early July the half dozen nesting pairs we had in the vicinity brought their young to our feeding station, stayed with them for a week or so and then took off for parts unknown, leaving the young behind. These juvenals, 18 of them, stayed around until the middle of September, then they too disappeared and we saw none until early winter." Although Greenleaf Chase of *Saranac Lake* did not have time to check on breeding territories he did observe an abundance of Evening Grosbeaks during the summer and was convinced that the species nested in approximately the same area as in 1953. Juvenal birds appeared at the feeding station June 23rd and continued to appear until early October. The old birds were infrequently seen after the end of August and in the month of September the population was made up of juvenals. On July 14th Mrs. Walter Frank, Jr., saw a male Evening Grosbeak feeding in a big cedar tree in her yard at *Trenton*.

NEW BRUNSWICK, 1955

Unfortunately observations were not made in the Green River watershed as in the previous year and so the status of the Evening Grosbeak in that part of the province for the summer of 1955 has not been evaluated. However, a summer report from *Fredericton* is of considerable significance. Mrs. R. G. Thexton observed 14 birds on August 12th near the city. She writes, "I thought at the time it was probably two families. Some were definitely adults. When I first spotted them, the entire flock was on a gravel road. For a minute or so I watched them at very close range from the car, then as I drew nearer the flock scattered. Several, which I presumed were the young, acted hesitant and flew onto a nearby fence before joining the remainder of the flock across the road in a pine and birch tree. Here they remained for at least a quarter of an hour."

MAINE, 1955

Evening Grosbeaks first appeared at the feeders at the camp of Mrs. Ivan Sherman at Big Lyford Pond, *Kokadjo*, about May 20th. "At first there were six but they increased in numbers until about 25 were appearing each day. They fed at the feeders for several weeks and then disappeared for a week or more. They then returned and were seen intermittently during the summer until some time in July, after which they left for good." (*Maine Field Naturalist*, Jan. 1956, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 22). On June 7th John J. Monahan observed two Evening Grosbeaks at *Millinocket*. At *Presque Isle* this species was reported as a summer resident by Glen Chamberlain. At two of the state campsites grosbeaks were observed: Ranger Edward Werler at the *Roaring Brook Campsite* between South Turner Mountain and Mt. Katahdin observed a pair daily for six weeks prior to August 19th. The birds were seen eating calcium chloride in the camp road. They were also observed in a yellow birch apparently eating old catkins from the previous year. The Evening Grosbeak had not been reported at this locality before. At the *South Branch Ponds Campsite* one male bird was observed in a tree toward the end of July by Ranger Dalton M. Kirk.

Additional reports from Maine appeared in the *Maine Field Naturalist*, Jan. 1956, 12(1): 27. "Mrs Therrien had adults and young come to her feeding station in *Eustis* in August. One was reported in *Skowhegan* on August 4th (Hill)."

NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1955

Near *Lincoln* on the Kancamaugus Highway Dr. Harry C. McDade observed on August 3rd at 7 P.M. at the junction of East Pond Trail with the highway one adult male Evening Grosbeak feeding or picking in the middle of a dirt road. The bird was watched for a short time until he flew away into the woods. On July 21st two grosbeaks were seen by Mrs. Richard Hebert at *New Hampton*. Fred Scott reported from *Pittsburg*, "another Evening Grosbeak nesting record. There have been a few Evening Grosbeaks all summer and August 9th there was a family group, two adults and three young and possibly more feeding on pin cherries in our yard." At the *Waterville Valley Inn* the author noted a male grosbeak on July 27th.

VERMONT, 1955

Vermont continued to be the most heavily populated Evening Grosbeak area in the northeast. Mrs. Edwin D. Brooks writes from *Landgrove*, "Last spring and summer starting May 7, 1955, I banded 15 males and 13 females and trapped two banded ones. The last one was banded on July 29th as I was not there during August. I am sure that at least six pairs nested near the farm. Many of those I banded were immature." From *Montpelier* Mrs. Nathan Greenberg reports, "One pair of Evening Grosbeaks nested in this vicinity during the summer months, pair visited stand and bird bath daily, then in July brought their young to the yard, two females and one male; these birds visited off and on until September, one adult female then became a visitor until early in September, say the 15th, then the birds were not seen again until November 2nd." At *Morgan* on August 9th and 10th eight or more grosbeaks were reported by Noble (fide Mrs. Ruth Emery). At *Sherburne* Miss Elizabeth Ball saw a pair on June 8th about two miles east of Long Trail Lodge. On July 9th she saw five, including two males, in *Mendon*, about five miles west of Long Trail Lodge. Mr. Herbert Allen reported that the Evening Grosbeaks nested around *Rochester* during the summer and he saw adults fairly frequently and a juvenal being fed. At Red Echo Farm, *Topsham*, the Misses Elizabeth and Alison Macdonald saw one grosbeak June 3rd and heard one July 7th. At *Waterbury* Mr. Lloyd Squier reported that Evening Grosbeaks nested near his property and at least 20 juvenals were observed (fide Downs). T. S. Fillebrown reports that the 1955 nesting record in *Woodstock* was the first to be reported since 1926. On June 27th and 28th one adult male banded on both legs came to the feeder of W. Y. Fillebrown located at the southwest edge of Woodstock Village and the same adult appeared June 29th. On this date Mrs. Harold Conner who lives at the northwest edge of the village reported to Richard Marble that two adult grosbeaks and two young were at her feeder and that adult birds were feeding the young. On June 30th an adult pair came to the W. Y. Fillebrown feeder. July 1st an adult pair and two young were observed at Mrs. Conner's feeder by T. S. Fillebrown and the young were seen being fed. Later on that day an adult pair and two young appeared at W. Y. Fillebrown feeder. From July 2nd to 10th an adult pair and two young came constantly to W. Y. Fillebrown feeder and young were fed. At times the adults came without young. In all of the above observations the adult male was banded on both legs so it was evidently the same bird. July 18th and 19th an unbanded male and one young came to W. Y. Fillebrown feeder and adult fed the young bird. July 23rd in the morning an unbanded male and one young (evidently a young male) came to T. S. Fillebrown feeder located about 4 miles southwest of the village. The adult fed the young bird. In the afternoon of the same day a young bird returned alone and began feeding itself. Later both adult and young returned. On July 24th an adult male and one young came several times to T. S. Fillebrown feeder. After this date Evening Grosbeaks were not observed. The summer records for *South Londonderry* are given in detail in Part II of this paper.

CONNECTICUT, 1955

As far as the author was able to determine, the state of Connecticut has had no previous summer records of Evening Grosbeaks and so the report of Dr. Sears for Mohegan Park in the city of *Norwichtown* in August is of considerable interest. His observations are reported by Mrs. Helene Knup. Dr. and Mrs. Sears were attracted by the call note heard around the feeding station in winter and then observed two pairs in the trees near the park lake, located in a large wooded area.

NEW YORK, 1955

From *Essex* Mrs. Marion C. Mason wrote that June 13th was the last date she saw a pair of Evening Grosbeaks which had apparently remained to nest in the area. From *Moravia* Ruby A. Sawyer writes, "We had been feeding the Evening Grosbeaks for several months until May 15th when they disappeared. On June 14th a male came to our window feeding station and came again on the 15th." Robert Christie, Jr., wrote from *Piseco* June 6, 1955, "Toward the last of April the flock began to build up and by early May we were feeding three pounds of sunflower seeds a day and they would have eaten more had it been supplied. Our largest count at any one time was 75 birds with males predominating. Some courting was apparent the second week in May and the birds started to leave, a few each day, until by the end of the month we were left with six pairs which are undoubtedly nesting in the vicinity." At *Saranac Lake* there was a summer population again as reported by Mrs. Charles S. Barnet. "Many baby Evening Grosbeaks were here this summer, as many as 20; some days they would come with a male adult and stay all day. There were fewer towards October and from the middle of October until the middle of November none were seen here." From the same locality another report was received from Greenleaf Chase who observed that juvenal birds appeared at the feeding stations the same week of June as in 1954 and stayed until early October. Although he did not check the breeding territories he did feel that the birds used approximately the same area as in 1954.

SUMMARY

Although there was a decline in the number of reports of summering Evening Grosbeaks in the Maritimes, New England and New York from a total of 43 reports in 1953 to 40 in 1954 and 27 in 1955, this reduction in figures may reflect a decline in reporter activity rather than a decline in the number of localities having summer resident populations of Evening Grosbeaks. There was an increase in the number of reports of immature Evening Grosbeaks from 13 reports in 1953 to 16 reports in 1954 with a decline to 10 in 1955. This could possibly indicate the results of a poor nesting season. With the exception of the *Norwichtown*, Connecticut, report, the area occupied was generally that used by the Evening Grosbeaks for their nesting range during 1953. However, of the 54 different localities reporting for 1954 and 1955 only 18 had reported Evening Grosbeaks in any summer prior to 1954. This may reflect increased observer interest or it may indicate a shifting from one summer to the next of the nesting areas favored by the Evening Grosbeaks.