

## JOHN JAMES AUDUBON AND JUVENILE EVENING GROSBEAKS<sup>1</sup>

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THE brightly colored male Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) and his trim mate, delicately marked in tones of gray with a slight overlay of delicate yellow around the neck and under the wings, have been with us here in New England in considerable numbers for slightly more than a decade and a half. At the Shaub Ornithological Research Station we have been interested in these magnificent birds not only for their vivacious activities at our feeding trays but because, overlooking sporadic invasions, they are such newcomers to our avifauna.

When we first became interested in making a detailed record of this species we went to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University where the late James L. Peters placed before us numerous trays of skins. There were the normal plumages of adult males and females with minor variations such as we observe at our feeding stations. Some males were quite dark in overall color, while others were light, with the yellows bright, fully saturated, and vivid. The females likewise varied from light to dark grays. However, there were no specimens then in the Harvard collection designated as males, in other than the adult plumage.

The juvenal plumages of the male and female Evening Grosbeaks were described by Magee (1934), an early bird-bander and student of ornithology, who resided at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, from which locality the type specimen was obtained and described. Magee's account fully described the appearance and behavior of the young birds which were observed and trapped at his banding station from 1921-33. He noted that there could be no mistake in distinguishing the sexes, as the wing and tail markings were distinctly those of the adult birds. Magee's descriptions appear to have been unknown to the mass of new "birders" at the time the Evening Grosbeak began the extension of its range on more or less regular schedule in the early 1940's.

The publication of the reprint of Audubon's "Birds of America" (1941) at a very nominal sum has made it possible for most families interested in birds to procure a copy. Consequently, many learn from Plate No. 424 that the immature male Evening Grosbeak has a plumage like that of the adult female. The same information was disclosed on Plate No. 207 of the Royal Octavo edition of 1840-44 (Fig. 1). These illustrations are among the great errors to be found in Audubon's superb paintings. It is, indeed, quite evident

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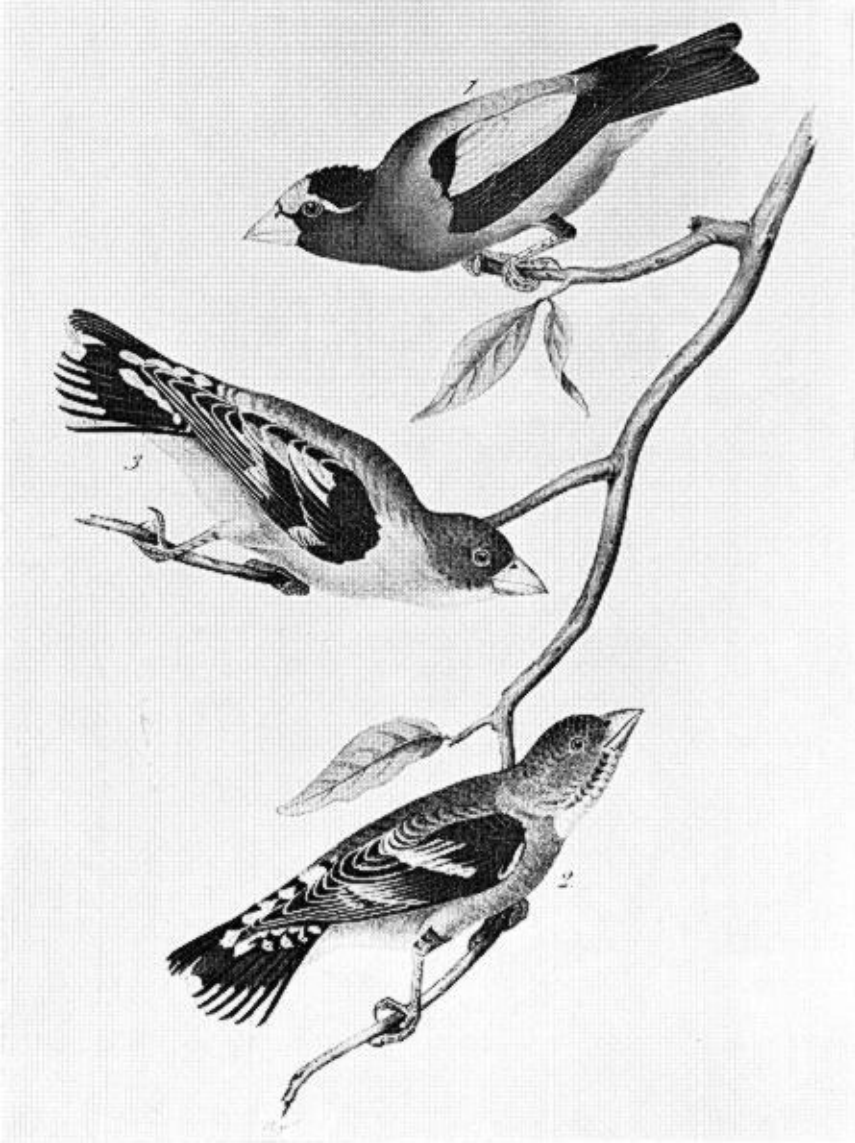


FIG. 1. A reproduction of Plate No. 207 of Audubon's "Birds of America" (1841-44). The description of the plate identifies the illustrations as: 1, a male Evening Grosbeak; 2, a female, and 3, a young male. It is this and similar illustrations of Audubon's which have led to the erroneous belief that both sexes in juvenal plumage are similar to or like the adult female.

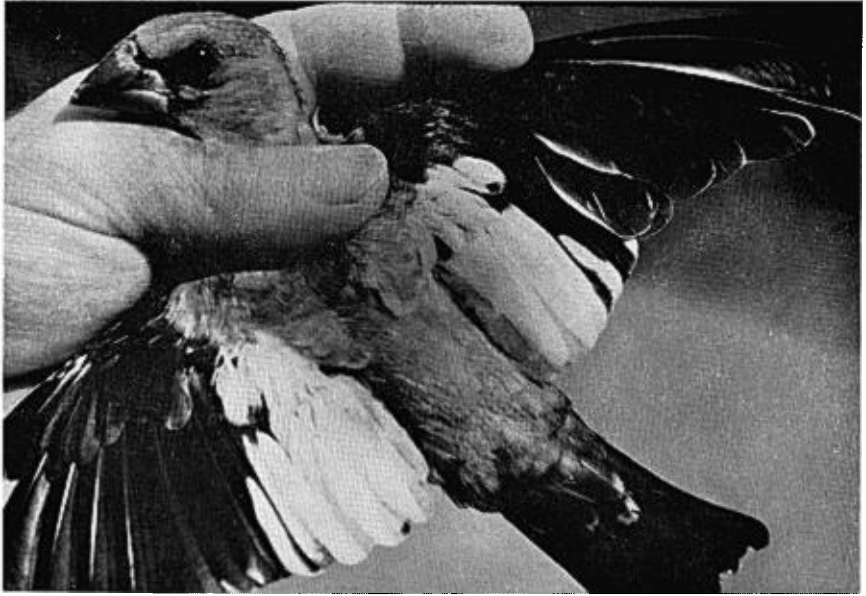


FIG. 2. Juvenile male Evening Grosbeak photographed on 35-mm Kodachrome at Saranac Lake, N. Y., 3 August 1952. Note the white secondaries, black primaries, and black tail as in the adult male. The body plumage is of a buff color throughout. The bill is a dark horn color.

that he had never seen a juvenile male Evening Grosbeak, and probably none were described prior to the account by Magee (op. cit.). There seems to be some basis for Audubon's speculation that the male's juvenal plumage should resemble that of the adult female. Among other carduelines, the young male Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) is indistinguishable from the female; the juvenal plumage of the goldfinch is like the adult female's, and even the brilliant adult male plumage changes to that of the female during the winter months.

The nesting areas of the Evening Grosbeak have not been well defined and are usually in the extensively wooded areas. In the eastern United States young had appeared at only a few places until the last 5 to 10 years, when they were observed at an increasing number of localities (cf. Shaub and Shaub, 1953; Shaub, 1951 and 1958). One of the earliest was at Saranac Lake, New York, where they made their appearance about 1946. In 1949, the writer photographed a juvenile female in this city, on Kodachrome film. This picture, probably the first ever made of a young Evening Grosbeak, was later published (Shaub, 1952) as a monochrome picture. During the summer of 1952, the writer trapped and banded a number of young grosbeaks at the



FIG. 3. Juvenile female Evening Grosbeak photographed on 35-mm Kodachrome at Saranac Lake, N. Y., 3 August 1952. Note the white band across the black outer primaries which is characteristic of the adult female, as well as the patchy white markings on the secondaries. The tips of the tail and tail coverts are white. The overall body color is buffy and is similar to that of the juvenile male.

residence of Greenleaf Chase, 125 Lake Street, Saranac Lake. One of each sex was photographed (Figs. 2 and 3). These illustrations have been published three times previously (Shaub and Shaub, 1953, 1954, 1956). Still, we continue to receive frequent reports of juvenile male Evening Grosbeaks having been seen throughout the winter in flocks with adults. Such reports arise from the mistaken idea that the juvenile plumages of the sexes are like, or similar to, that of the adult female.

We have made numerous attempts to point out that the sexes are clearly and definitely distinguishable while the birds are in juvenal plumage, and that the first winter plumage of both sexes is like the adult. The change from the juvenal to the first winter or adult plumage occurs between the middle of September and the latter part of October (Shaub, 1958). Only one report records the appearance of a juvenile male as late as 26 October. Thus Evening Grosbeaks as they appear during their winter sojourn are readily distinguished as to sex, and immatures or birds of the year are indistinguishable from the adults by the average bird watcher. However, in early October there may be an occasional individual still in the process of molting to the first winter plumage. Males and females in juvenal plumage have the same wing and tail patterns as the respective adults; the body feathers are buff in both sexes, and much alike, the juvenal male lacking the bright yellow frontal band and black crest. In juveniles of both sexes the bill is a dark horn color, which changes to yellowish when the first winter plumage is acquired.

Once an inaccuracy appears in such a book as Audubon's, it is indeed dif-

ficult to erase the error and to establish the truth in subsequent journals of more limited circulation.

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