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Polygyny in the Evening Grosbeak.—Evening Grosbeaks (Coccothraustes vespertinus) are assumed to be exclusively monogamous (e.g., Verner and Willson, Ecology 47:143–147, 1966; Lack, Ecological Adaptations for Breeding Birds, Methuen, London, England, 1968; Terres, The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, Knopf, New York, New York, 1980). Here we present data suggesting that they are at times polygynous. During the summer of 1984 we observed a banded male Evening Grosbeak in two different nesting areas (A and B; about 1.6 km apart) simultaneously associating with two females. Both nests produced young. Observations were made in the Wild Basin area of Allenspark, Colorado (elevation 2591 m), about 80 km northwest of Boulder, Colorado.

Of the two nests, B lagged behind A by about eight days. While female A was incubating, female B was engaged in courtship and nestbuilding. The male sporadically fed female A while she was incubating, but during this period he spent most of his time with female B, courting, guarding her from other males, and participating in nestbuilding. Once young birds were present at nest A, the male spent most of his time feeding them. During this time the male was observed at nest B feeding the incubating female only once, and was not seen there again until the nestlings at B were about 12 days old.

The forest in which these birds lived had a major outbreak of spruce budworm (Choristoneura fumiferana) and a minor outbreak of aspen leaf rollers (C. conflictana) during summer 1984. Although Evening Grosbeaks are generally assumed to be exclusively monogamous, polygyny may be facilitated when unusually plentiful food and restricted nesting areas influence the "polygyny threshold" (Verner and Willson, 1966; Orians, Am. Nat. 103: 589–603, 1969). In our study area, suitable nesting sites were not restricted. Because polygyny appears to occur very rarely in Evening Grosbeaks regardless of environmental conditions, our observation may be a case of "incidental" polygyny.

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