Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Pheucticus ludovicianus

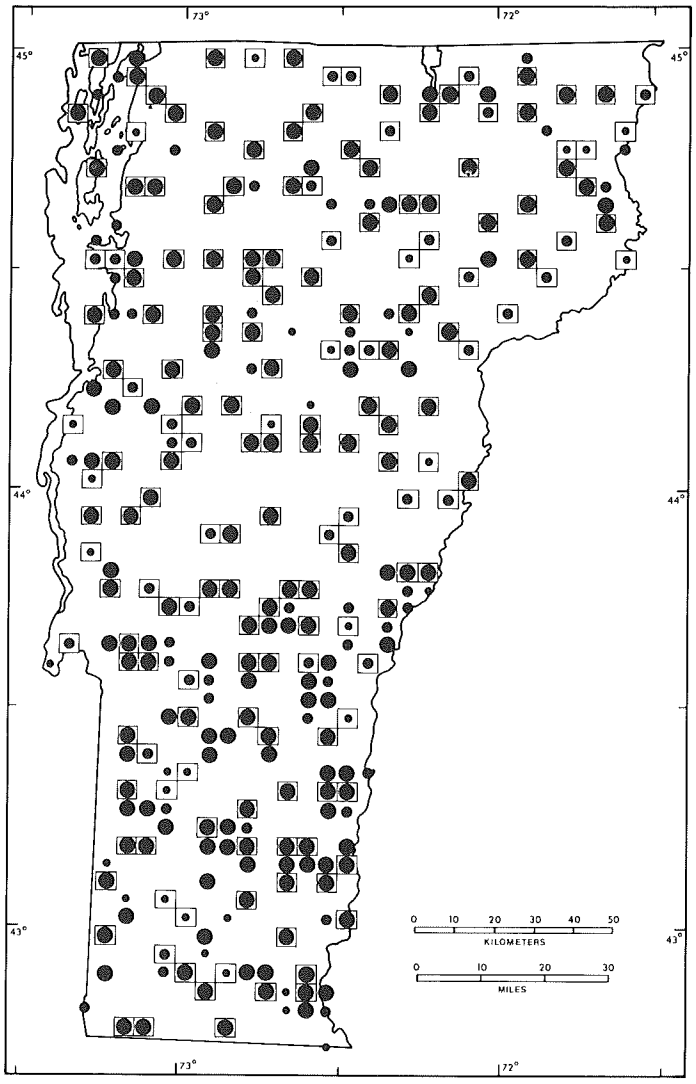
The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is one of the most widespread residents of deciduous forest and its edge in Vermont. While it is not as abundant as the less conspicuous Red-eyed Vireo or as well adapted to urban areas as the familiar American Robin, this handsome bird may be readily encountered in almost any part of the state. This species was one of seven that were represented in all 179 priority blocks. The broad climatic tolerance and distribution of these birds suggest that this species is close to the center of its range. The upper elevational limit of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak's range is about 765 m (2,510 ft).

Habitats utilized by Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are characterized by deciduous trees of medium to considerable height that form a canopy over a thick growth of tall shrubbery or saplings. These birds are also found in brushy ecotones at the edges of woodlands such as clear cuts, overgrown pastures, shrub swamps, and overgrown orchards. Tall trees are required for song perches and foraging. Nests at Hubbard Brook, New Hampshire were placed at a mean height of 14.5 m (47.6 ft) (R. Holmes, pers. comm.); the average height of 12 Vermont nests was 5.2 m (17 ft). The nest is often placed in the fork of a branch in a large tree, away from the bole (R. Holmes, pers. comm.); it is a loose platform constructed of sticks and weed stems, lined with grasses. Anderson and Daugherty (1974), in their study of hybridization in *Pheucticus* grosbeaks in South Dakota, found that nests above 4.6 m (15 ft) were more frequent in woodlots having poorly developed understories; they also reported that grosbeaks more than a year old distinctly preferred denser woods with well-developed understories.

The first Rose-breasted Grosbeaks return to Vermont during the first week of May. Location of pairs is made relatively easy by the male's melodious warbling song and bright coloration, as well as by the species' tendency to inhabit edges and to visit summer feeding stations. The low to medium height of the nest also facilitates confirmation. Males share incubation duties, and sometimes lead observers to the nest by bursting into song while still on the nest. Active nests provided the means of confirmation for 16% of the breeding grosbeaks recorded by the Atlas Project in Vermont. More frequently, parents carrying food or noisy family groups provided the means of confirmation (43% and 34%, respectively).

Eggs are laid in late May and early June in most cases; records from 10 nests in Vermont range from May 26 to June 28. Six records of nests with young extend from June 13 to July 12, and dependent young have been reported from June 21 to July 31 (16 records). Clutch size may range from 3 to 6 eggs, with 4 being most common. The species is single-brooded, although some pairs will renest when a clutch is destroyed during incubation. The autumn migration commences in August and peaks during early September. Most Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are gone by late September, but a handful of records extend into October. With the recent increase in popularity of winter bird-feeding, records of this quintessential summer bird have increased in the northeastern U.S. during winter. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks normally winter from central Mexico to northern South America.

Most early authors of accounts of Vermont bird life found Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at least locally common in deciduous



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 179 (100%)

Possible breeding:	20 (11.0% of total)
Probable breeding:	33 (18.5% of total)
Confirmed breeding:	126 (70.5% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	17
Green Mountains	54	100	30
North Central	19	100	11
Northeast Highlands	16	100	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	24	100	13

forests at the turn of the century. Apparently the species experienced an adaptive shift early in this century or late in the 1800s: the number of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks increased as the species moved into suburban and farm habitats. Ross (1914) noted a distinct increase around 1910 in Bennington County. According to recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird survey data (Robbins 1982b) the species is increasing at a rate of 10% a year in Vermont and 5.2% on the continent.

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