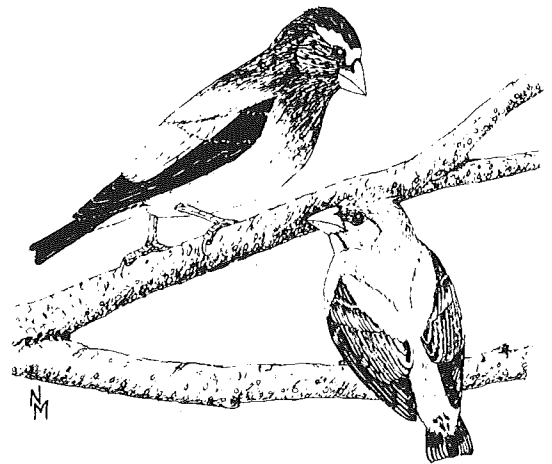


Evening Grosbeak

Coccothraustes vespertinus

This familiar—in winter even common—species is a relatively recent arrival in New England, which it colonized from the West. None of the nineteenth-century bird lists for New England and Vermont mention the Evening Grosbeak. Forbush (1927) stated that the first report of the Evening Grosbeak east of the Great Lakes was made in 1854 in Toronto; small flocks reached Ohio by 1860 and New York State by 1887. Bagg and Elliot (1937) reported that a single grosbeak was seen “during the winter of 1875” at Elizabethtown, New York, on the shores of Lake Champlain. The winter of 1889–90 saw the first large Evening Grosbeak invasion of New England: birds were seen or collected in Vermont (apparently the first record), New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Winter visitations in most of those areas were also reported for six winter seasons between 1908 and 1922. Observers at St. Johnsbury first recorded Evening Grosbeaks in August 1893 (a pair was seen), which suggests that the species could have been breeding in Vermont by that early date. No more were seen at St. Johnsbury until 1913, after which they also appeared in 1916, 1917, 1921, 1928, 1930, 1936, and 1949, according to bird records kept at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Evening Grosbeaks have been reported at a feeder in Plainfield each winter since 1950 (M. F. Metcalf, pers. comm.). The first Evening Grosbeaks to appear in the East were winter visitors and usually appeared between October and January.

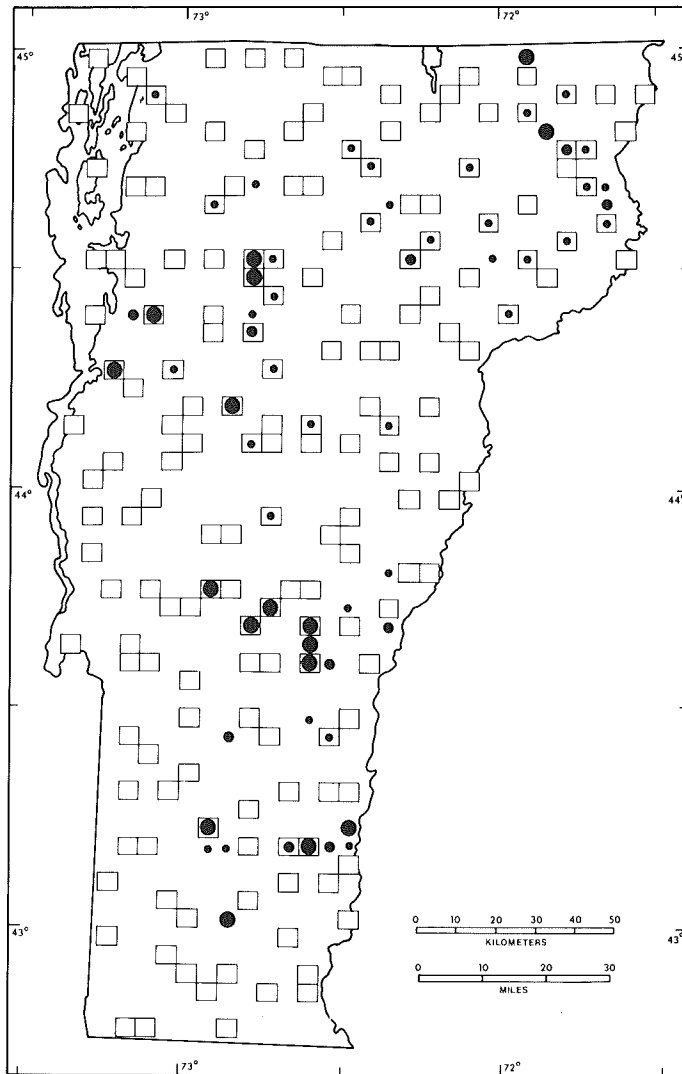
Apparently the planting (and later self-seeding to the wild) of the box elder across what were once prairie stretches provided a “baited highway” along which the grosbeaks were able to pass eastward (Bent 1968). The seeds of the box elder hang on the trees all winter, and several observers report that Evening Grosbeaks prefer them to almost anything else—with the possible exception of sunflower seeds, which they devour with



relish at feeding trays. Salted gravel also attracts them, as it does many northern finches.

The Evening Grosbeak was slow to develop the habit of lingering beyond the winter season in Vermont. The earliest breeding record in Vermont dates from 1926 in Woodstock, when a pair with four young, very short-tailed and downy-headed, was observed at a feeding station on July 12–14 (Marble 1926). This nesting report was incorrectly dated by Fortner et al. (1933) as 1923. The second recorded breeding confirmation in Vermont was in Londonderry, where the arrival of the first young of the year at a feeder occurred on June 26, 1953; first young also appeared on the same date in 1954 and 1955 (Bent 1968). Since the 1950s the species seems to have become increasingly regular in summer in Vermont, though breeding pairs are still uncommon and rather widely scattered. Most confirmations during the Atlas Project came from the Green Mountains; the Northeast Highlands had the highest percentage of priority block reports. Only in the Taconic Mountains were no Evening Grosbeaks found.

The presence of spruces, firs, and other conifers seems essential for nesting pairs, though mixed woodlands and even residential shade trees are acceptable. The nest is a loosely made, shallow cup of twigs lined with rootlets and bark shreds, placed 1.8–21.3 m (6–70 ft) above the ground, often in a dense leaf cluster near the end of a branch



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 41 (23%)

Possible breeding: 25 (61% of total)

Probable breeding: 4 (10% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 12 (29% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	5	16	12
Green Mountains	14	26	34
North Central	5	26	12
Northeast Highlands	8	50	20
East Central	5	26	12
Taconic Mountains	0	0	0
Eastern Foothills	4	17	10

(Godfrey 1966; Terres 1980). The 3 to 5 eggs, bluish green marked with browns and grays, are incubated by the female alone. The incubation period seems to last 12 to 14 days; young leave the nest 13 to 14 days after hatching (Bent 1968; Terres 1980). There are no egg dates for Vermont; copulation has been observed on June 1, and fledglings have been seen from June 17 to July 19.

Evening Grosbeaks are highly gregarious and are often seen in small groups even when nesting. Fall and winter flocks may number more than 100 birds that travel and feed together, often visiting feeding stations and favored seed trees at regular intervals. A

variety of seeds are eaten; those of spruces, firs, and maples are favored.

Precise arrival and departure dates of migrating Evening Grosbeaks are difficult to establish. Migratory grosbeaks are easily confused with birds already in residence. Southward and eastward flights can be more extensive in some winters than others; Evening Grosbeaks may travel as far south as South Carolina and Alabama in irruption years.

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