

EVENING GROSBEAK BANDING AT WATERTOWN, NEW YORK

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Banding helps us to learn some facts about birds that could hardly be discovered in any other way. We can find out where our summer birds spend their winters and whether or not some individuals return the following summer. From banding records we can learn how far birds fly per day when they are migrating and how long they can be expected to live. Perhaps we can find out where our winter birds breed.

It is necessary to band a large number of birds, because for small non-game birds very few bands are ever found and reported. Among the easiest of our winter birds to band are the Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*). Some years they are with us from December to the middle of May. On cold days especially they are hungry and eager for their sunflower seeds. One bird in a trap seems to attract others rather than to scare them away. Evening Grosbeaks are conspicuous birds and when one is found dead or injured it is likely to be noticed and its band number reported.



Evening Grosbeak with band. Photo by — Cecil Drake.

One of the thrills of bird banding is to band a new species. My first Evening Grosbeak was banded on April 8, 1955. At that time I would never have dreamed that so many more would follow. By January 1, 1964 I had banded a total of 5320 Evening Grosbeaks or slightly more than half of the 10,480 birds of 72 species I have banded in twelve years.

Birds to be banded can be caught in a number of types of traps. The four-cell Potter trap works very well for Evening Grosbeaks. Each cell can catch a single bird and the weight of the bird in the trap closes the door. A funnel-type trap which can take a dozen or more birds at a time can be

used. When several birds are busy feeding some find their way inside, but only rarely can one find its way out. The numbered aluminum bands are supplied by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Banding does not seem to reduce the number of Evening Grosbeaks at our feeders. Some of them return soon after being banded and a few have been caught later the same day. Others are trapped again a few days or weeks later. The birds seem about as numerous at our feeders as at other places where they are not being banded.

Many persons in Watertown are interested in birds and put out sunflower seeds for them. Several of these feeders are located within a few blocks of our home. As a result the Evening Grosbeaks seem to shop around and many of them visit two or three feeders during the forenoon. Usually we have more than one flock a day. One flock can be told from another by its size, sex, and number of birds with bands. Individual birds shift from one flock to another frequently. One Evening Grosbeak I banded was trapped again three hours later two miles from the place of banding.

TABLE OF RECOVERIES AND FOREIGN RECOVERIES

State or Province	Recoveries	Foreign Recoveries
Manitoba	1	0
Ontario	22	8
Quebec	32	0
New Brunswick	5	0
Maine	4	1
New Hampshire	3	1
Vermont	2	2
Massachusetts	5	6
Connecticut	0	6
New York	29	14
New Jersey	1	2
Pennsylvania	19	9
Ohio	1	0
Michigan	9	1
Wisconsin	6	2
Iowa	1	0
Maryland	0	1
Virginia	3	1
West Virginia	3	0
Tennessee	1	0

Some days I have banded more birds than could be seen in any single flock. Several times I have banded thirty to forty birds a day. The best day was January 16, 1960 when I banded 114. The next day 58 more were banded.

A recovery means that a banded bird has been found and the band number reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The bird may be found dead or injured. A recovery can also mean that the bird was caught alive and released. The Fish and Wildlife Service sends a report of the banding and recovery to both the bander and the person making the recovery.

A foreign retrap means that a bander has trapped a bird already banded by another bander, but to the person who banded the bird it is a recovery.

Birds recovered the same winter they were banded have usually been found south of the place of banding. Recoveries were made at Deposit (3), Ithaca (2), Etna (2), Webster, Oneida, Herkimer and Candor, New York. Three were in Pennsylvania. A few birds that I have trapped have been banded the same winter in Ontario and one came from Vermont. Most recoveries in May, June and July have been in Canada.

The recoveries show the number of Evening Grosbeaks banded in Watertown and later found dead or alive in each state or province. The foreign retraps show the number banded in the places indicated and later trapped and released in Watertown, New York.

The Quebec recoveries include 13 birds shot during June and July on the west branch of the Patapedia River near Lac Humqui. They were reported by the late Monsieur Brosseau, St. Leon le Grand, Rimouski County. He was misinformed and believed that such recoveries were desired by the Fish and Wildlife Service. At least 270 Evening Grosbeaks were destroyed of which 69 had been banded in New York State by 15 banders. G. H. and H. C. Parks visited this region in June 1962. In eleven days, June 15-25, they trapped and banded 500 Evening Grosbeaks using sunflower seed as bait. They also trapped 16 banded birds, one of which I banded February 19, 1960.

A recovery can give some idea of how far a bird flies in a day. An Evening Grosbeak banded at Kingston, Ontario, April 16, 1958 was taken in one of my traps the next day. On January 13, 1956 I banded a female which flew into a window at Candor, New York on January 16. The distance is about 120 miles. A male I banded April 11, 1955 was re-trapped here seven years later on April 28, 1962. On May 25, 1962 this bird was trapped in New Brunswick, probably near Saint John. This is the longest time between banding and recovery of any bird I have banded.

When the first Evening Grosbeaks of the winter season appear at our feeders, they often seem to know just where to go for their favorite sunflower seeds. They act as if they had been here before. Banding returns do not indicate that they have ever been here before. The first birds to arrive seldom have bands. Banded Evening Grosbeaks do return the following winter or even two or three years later but the number is small, perhaps not more than two percent a year.

About two-thirds of the recoveries made outside of Quebec have been birds trapped and released by other banders. Some have been reported as dead or injured. Causes of death include: killed by automobile, flew against a window or other object, killed by hawk or owl and caught by a cat. Two were shot and one was frightened by a predator and flew against a window. In Watertown one apparently was killed by a Cooper's Hawk and one by a Saw-whet Owl.

An Evening Grosbeak which I trapped in Watertown December 11, 1963 had been banded in Syracuse, New York by Mr. Benjamin P. Burtt March 16, 1956. The length of time between banding and recovery, nearly seven years and nine months is the longest of any bird I have trapped. This interval is a little longer than for any bird I have banded.

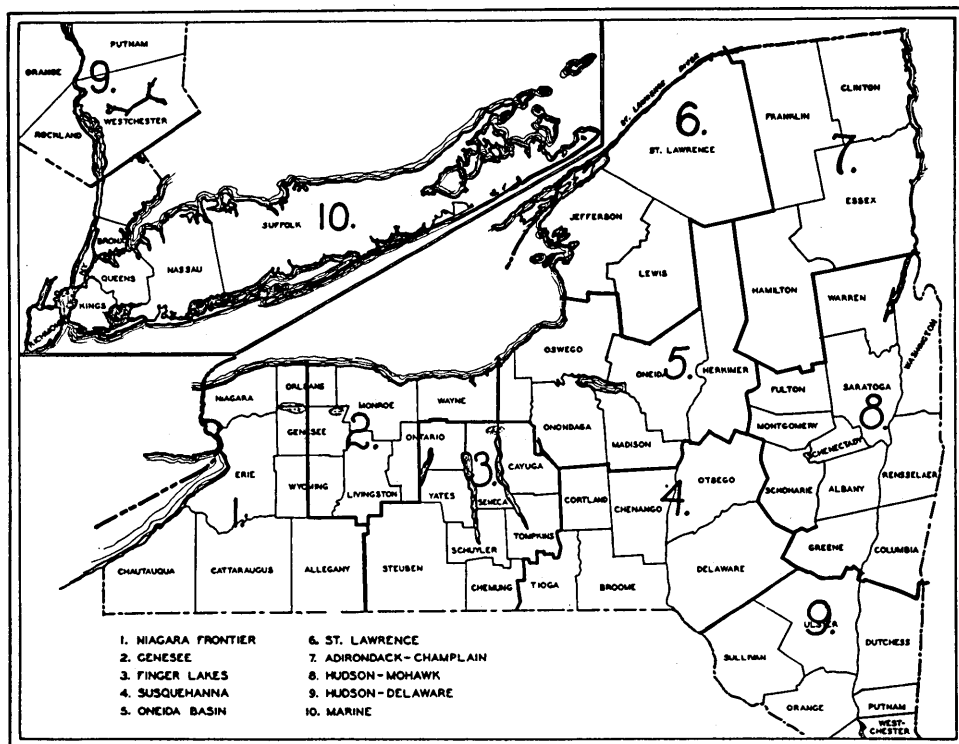
A male Evening Grosbeak banded in Watertown April 16, 1960 was trapped in Seven Sister Falls, Manitoba, January 6, 1963. This is about one thousand miles from the place of banding and is the greatest distance of any recovery from the point of banding.

Banding of Evening Grosbeaks has been a very rewarding experience. It does require a great deal of time, but it is time well spent. There are still many things we do not know about birds and banding will help us to find some of the answers.

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- 173 Haley Street, Watertown

REPORTING REGIONS



For descriptions of Regions see Kingbird Vol. IV, Nos. 1 and 2

The Kingbird