

THE EVENING GROSBEAK IN NEW YORK STATE

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A century ago the Evening Grosbeak was virtually unknown in New York and adjacent states, as well as in eastern Canada. The early reports on this species came from the region of the western Great Lakes, and seemed to fit the pattern of a number of "winter finches" — irregular and unpredictable. During the latter part of the nineteenth century reports increased of Evening Grosbeaks in winter and spring in Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and the Province of Ontario.

At this time very little was known as to the summer home of this species. The first A.O.U. Checklist (1886) gives the distribution as "Western North America east of Lake Superior, and casually to Ohio and Ontario; from the fur countries south into Mexico". Presumably this included all three subspecies as they are recognized today. Somewhat later Butler (1892) gives the range in the following terms "It spends the summer in the north-western United States and western British America, from just east of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. From there it migrates very irregularly in autumn to the eastward, casually reaching over a greater or less part of the eastern United States, north of a line drawn from the mouth of the Ohio east to the Atlantic."

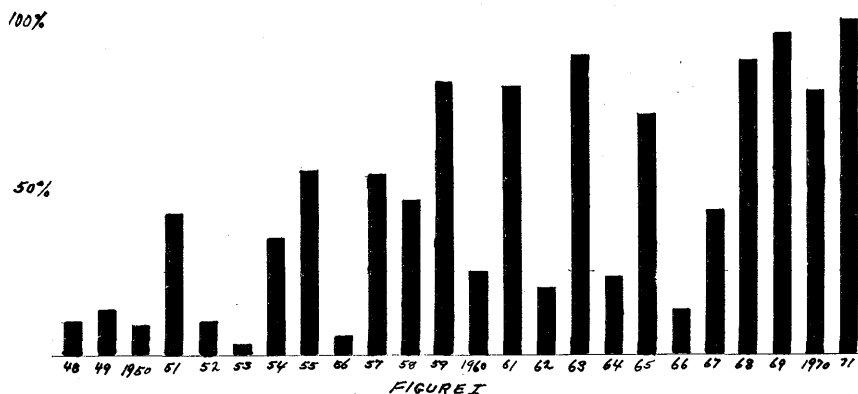
This was written following the "great invasion" of the winter of 1889-90 which brought Evening Grosbeaks to much of the northeast, including many parts of New York State. Prior to this there are a few records for our state, but the "great invasion" resulted in numerous observations, Eaton (1914) recording at least twenty.

In considering the period since 1890 it is well to bear in mind that there has been a continued increase in observers and recorded observations as well as the continued increase in Evening Grosbeaks in the northeast. Several early writers mention the Box Elder or Manitoba Maple (*Acer negundo*) as one factor in the eastward spread of the species, seeds of this tree being a favorite food. In more recent years the very extensive availability of sunflower seeds at feeding trays has been an influence. In any event the Evening Grosbeak is now a common if somewhat irregular winter and spring visitor to many parts of New York State.

The published reports of Christmas Counts (National Audubon Society) in New York State have been utilized to give some idea of winter distribution since 1948. In interpreting these data it should be realized that they are based on birds observed in a short period in early winter. Figure 1 shows the percentage of counts in the state reporting one or more Evening Grosbeaks. The number of counts varied from 29 to 50, averaging about 42. As would be expected, there was a

wide variation in total numbers, from a low of two in 1956 to a high, of 12,123 in 1971.

*PERCENT OF COUNTS IN N.Y. STATE
WITH ONE OR MORE EVENING GROSBEAKS*



Less is known of the eastward extension of the breeding range of this species than its winter distribution. Definite breeding data are limited but evidence points to a range extending east to Cape Breton Island. This is a rather narrow belt, mainly in southern Canada, stretching eastward from Lake Superior. It is believed the eastward winter movement preceded the extension of the breeding range, and as more and more birds spent the winter in the northeast they moved north rather than northwest to nest. Due to the scarcity of actual nest records it is necessary to rely mainly on summer occurrences in delineating the breeding range. It includes parts of the Adirondacks which lie in the Coniferuos-Deciduous Forest Ecotone.

Initial summer records for the Adirondacks were in the 1940's. There is a July 1942 observation in Essex County, followed by a late June record near the Wanakena Ranger School in southeastern St. Lawrence County. More positive evidence came from the village of Saranac Lake with adult Evening Grosbeaks bringing young to feeding stations in the late 1940's.

This species, adaptable and biologically successful, has expanded its range significantly since the mid nineteenth century. It appears that birds first moved south in winter from the Lake Superior region until blocked by the mid-west prairies. In search of food they moved irregularly eastward, in ever increasing numbers toward the end of the nineteenth century. The breeding range was extended eastward as birds migrated north rather than northwest to their original home. During the past twenty-five years both the winter and summer range has extended to the Atlantic coast, with a considerable population now indigenous to the northeast, both in Canada and the United States.

LITERATURE CITED

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