

EVENING GROSBEAK BREEDING IN CHENANGO COUNTY-JUNE 2002

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A pair of Evening Grosbeaks was present all spring in the Town of Plymouth, Chenango County, NY (Atlas block 4471C). When they persisted into June, possible breeding was suspected. Nevertheless, the odds were against it because their normal breeding range is in the Adirondacks and Canada (Peterson 1988, D'Anna 1998).

However, when the male appeared at the Dennis' sunflower seed feeders with a fledgling on 29 Jun 2002, Erica Dennis snapped the accompanying photos and breeding was confirmed! At least two fledglings were seen that day. Both the adults and fledglings often perched on the house roof. The female was not seen feeding the young, and no Evening Grosbeaks were seen after 30 Jun.

The house is about 100 yards from the nearest tall tree. The area is mainly open grassland with two houses and some conifers and hardwoods several hundred yards distant. Close beyond is the large New Michigan State Forest (9120 acres) with many Norway spruce and red pine plantations.

A prior record of confirmed breeding in Chenango County is reported in the Atlas (Peterson 1988). The printout from the DEC has it in block 4571B as FY (adults with food for young or feeding young) in 1983. This block is in the Town of North Norwich, about 9 miles from our Plymouth site. Nearby are the Whaupanaucan and Skinner Hill state forests (1093 and 1666 acres).

A breeding-plumaged Evening Grosbeak was seen in the hamlet of South Otselic by Dave Messineo through late July 1988 (Lehman 1989), about 10 miles from this Plymouth site. That same year Windsor had a male on 29 May in the Town of Pharsalia, about 5 miles away. The elevation at Plymouth is 1880 feet. South Otselic is only 1224 feet, but is surrounded by hills exceeding 1700 feet. The Pharsalia site is 1780 feet. The North Norwich site (Jay G. Lehman, pers. comm.) is 1380 feet, but nearby are hills over 1800 feet.

We never saw the female feeding the young or in view when the male was doing the feeding. Because young Evening Grosbeaks resemble adult females and because males feed females as part of their courtship ritual, as well as on the nest (Speirs 1968), we considered the possibility that we saw the male feeding an adult female. The adult female "assumes a posture similar to that of the young begging to be fed (crest raised, body crouched slightly and wings fluttering)" is Downs' description quoted by Speirs (p. 210). Nevertheless, when one chick fledges before its siblings, the male will feed it while the female stays on the nest (Speirs, p. 217). However, visible on the prints, just discernible on Fig.1, but prominent on Fig.2, is the "birthmark", the "small yellowish patch composed of the four inner secondary coverts", which persists until the postjuvenile molt almost a month later (Speirs, p. 218). This characteristic dispelled any doubts about whether the bird being fed was an adult female or a juvenile.

In Chenango County we see some Evening Grosbeaks just about every winter. In 1983 and 2002, the preceding winters had low counts of Evening Grosbeaks (Marsi 1983, Salo 2002). However, the winter of 1987-88 had fairly high numbers (Lehman 1988). Therefore there is no indication that breeding here this year is a result of some birds remaining after a heavy incursion. We do not have many active field birders in this county and that may be an important reason why we do not pick up more breeding of this species.

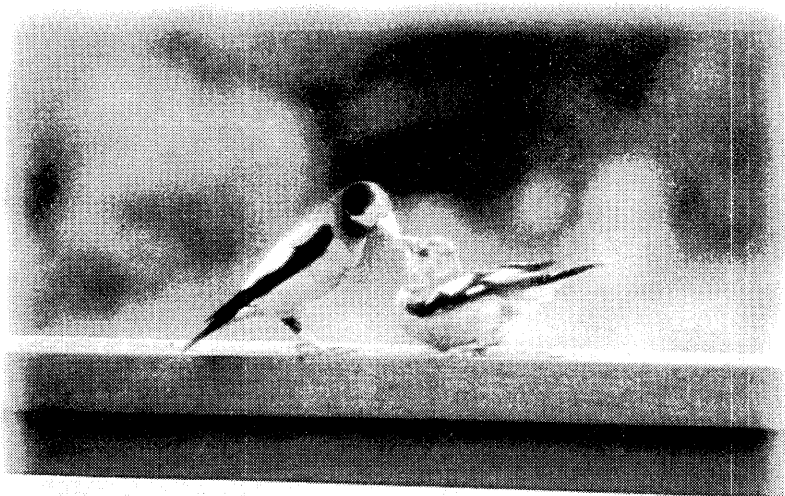


Fig. 1
Adult male Evening Grosbeak
feeding a fledged female
on 29 June 2002 in Chenango County.

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Fig.2

Juvenile female Evening Grosbeak 29 Jun 2002 in Chenango Co..

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