

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH IN NEW YORK'S CATSKILL MOUNTAINS

When I was packing my pack in preparation for a winter hike in New York's Catskill Mountains, I nearly took my binos out of my pack to save weight. I thought, "I'm not going to see anything interesting in the mountains in December." Good thing I didn't leave them behind.

From the trailhead on Big Hollow Road (also called County Road 56), my companions and I set out into the Blackhead Mountains, in the northern Catskill Mountains of Greene County, New York. We hiked 1.7 miles to the saddle between Black Head and Black Dome, then about 0.6 miles to the peak of Black Dome. The latter isn't obvious (I never saw a marker), and the whole summit area above about 3500' looks very similar. It was in this area, between a viewpoint facing east toward Black Head and another facing south, that one of my companions asked me, "What's this bird that just flew off the trail?" The bird in question was finch-sized, with an unmistakable brownish-pink hue, gray and black crown, and bright pink on the belly and wings.

When I saw the bird, I immediately knew what it was but was afraid to say anything, because what I was seeing seemed impossible: Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch! I was speechless for a moment, thinking at any second it would fly off, and surely no one would believe me! My friends weren't birders, but on seeing how excited I became, they got very excited too, and we stayed and watched and photographed the bird for 20 minutes or so. A photo is reproduced in this issue on page 142.

The bird was perched only 15' off the ground and seemed to be waiting until we left so it could go back to feeding on the ground on the trail. Eventually, we were able to walk directly under the bird, where I could take a picture that showed enough detail to be identifiable. The exact coordinates of the site are: 42 degrees 16.199' N, 74 degrees 07.361' W.

It appears to be an adult of the interior race, and furthermore seems to be individually distinct from the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch that appeared in north of Utica, NY, in March, having some different markings on the face and a lesser extent of pink in the body and wings.

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