

## Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch in Locust Grove, NY —A Birding Experience

On the evening of Sunday March 4, 2012, I was surfing “New York Birders”, our new Facebook page, when I saw a post by Benjamin Van Doren titled “*Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch in Northern NY apparently... another one?!*” At that very moment my cell phone rang with an excited call from my friend Corey Finger. “You saw the report?” I asked. He said, “I’m going tomorrow!”

Over the next several hours, amidst a flurry of phone calls, e-mails and Facebook messages, we determined where the bird was, got permission to visit, and agreed on our plans. Corey, Isaac Grant and I would meet in Queens at 4:30 a.m., pick up Benjamin in Westchester, and make the five-hour, 285-mile drive to Locust Grove, on the Tug Hill Plateau in southern Lewis County.

During the ride my thoughts turned to this remarkable rarity. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) is one of the coolest birds in North America. It and its congeners breed at higher elevation than any other bird in North America. My experience with the species consisted of a snow-bound afternoon watching a feeder in Georgetown, Colorado, and a chilly stop to see the birds on a barren windblown scree slope, 9950 feet in elevation at Tioga Pass in Yosemite National Park.

So just how bizarre is a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch in New York? Well, the only other record came on December 22, 2011, by a lone birder hiking remote Black Dome Mountain in the Catskills. Records in eastern North America are extremely sparse. Winter 2011-2012 was somewhat of an “irruption” year, with 10 records east of the Rocky Mountains. The closest to New York was Rossport, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Superior some 700 miles from Locust Grove!

Our day of marathon driving was memorable not only because we were successful in our twitch, but for the extraordinary hospitality of homeowner and host, Nancy Loomis. Nancy went to great lengths to make sure everyone had a pleasant experience. She directed parking, set out tape to guide people to the best viewing area, talked to her visitors, fielded phone calls, and made sure word got out to the birding lists each day. She even provided restroom facilities. Hundreds of birders fortunate enough to be able to make the trip have Nancy’s good will to thank.

Nancy gives the following account of her experience:

On Sunday morning, March 4, 2012 as I was doing my Project FeederWatch count, I noticed a bird on my deck that caught my eye. It was no other bird I had ever seen at my feeders or out birding. The gray crown, the pink on the wings, and the pink tinge on the body caught my attention. I started taking pictures and texting my sister Janet, who was at work. She suggested many birds it could be and I kept texting “NO”. She then suggested I put a picture on the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Facebook page. Within fifteen minutes it was identified as a Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finch. I looked it up on the Internet and couldn’t believe

just how far out of its territory it was! Washington State, Alaska and the Rocky Mountains; I was amazed! I let my sister know and we sent a few more pictures out on the Internet to make sure that it was a Rosy-Finch. Once birders found out, my sister was overwhelmed with many e-mails and I with cell phone calls. Everybody wanted to come see the bird and I turned no one down, knowing it was a life bird for most. Rosy, as we nicknamed him, ate from the deck, the birdbath feeder, and a hopper feeder. He never went to the tube feeders or the thistle feeder. He seemed to like the mixed seed the most. Rosy would show up around 6:30 every morning and be gone between 3:30 and 4:30 in the afternoon. He would eat for a while then fly off and come back in an hour or so. On Thursday March 8, 2012 he was seen early in the morning, then he was gone. It was the experience of a lifetime watching him for five days. I would like to thank everyone who came to see Rosy. Many birders drove many miles. 150 people signed my log and I know many more came that didn't sign. One man signed from Wyckoff, New Jersey via Scotland. Many people came from New York City. Unfortunately for some, Rosy didn't stay for the weekend. A couple even came from Fletcher, North Carolina on Saturday. The birders were all very respectful of our privacy and of the rules I put forth. I met a lot of amazing and interesting people through this experience, and will forever hold it close to my heart.

Because my own experience was so extraordinary, I decided to ask other birders to share theirs. Several did, and their accounts, copied below, make it clear that the human experience is an essential part of our wonderful pastime. Thank you, Nancy!

-- Seth Ausubel, 118-17 Union Turnpike, Forest Hills, NY 11375; with Nancy Loomis, 2788 State Route 12D, Locust Grove, NY 13309

## **Birders Share Their Experiences**

*Who needs Colorado? Colorado and a few other western states in winter are the most reliable places to see Rosy-Finches, typically at feeders. For a few days in March the trip was a lot shorter - about 300 miles each way from Long Island. Highway miles all the way, nice weather, gracious homeowner, cooperative bird. What more could you want? I suggested starting a log and Nancy did so right away, then went one better, allowing visitors to use the facilities in her barn/garage. Thanks again Nancy, it was a pleasure. And you have a great boss who sent you home to enjoy the bird and its human visitors.*  
David Klauber, North Massapequa, NY.

*After a long chase, with the constant, nagging uncertainty of a bird's presence, nothing is more satisfying than spectacular looks and a welcoming host. I thank Nancy for her graciousness in sharing this incredible find.*

Benjamin Van Doren, White Plains, NY.

*I can claim to have tried twice for this bird in NYS and achieved a double dip. Like a birding George Costanza, I fear someone might try to wrestle my binos away from me. I wonder where my feathered fatale will lead me next.*

Arie Gilbert, North Babylon, NY.

*This is not Locust Grove's first brush with ornithological fame. The ornithologist and author of **Birds of New Mexico**, Florence Augusta Merriam Bailey, was born there in 1863.*

Corey Finger, Forest Hills, NY, 10,000 Birds.

*I first heard about the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch Sunday night while driving home from Cape May. Stuck in traffic on the Garden State Parkway, I glanced at my phone and saw Benjamin Van Doren's post on the New York Birders Facebook page. Something about a Rosy-Finch appearing at someone's feeder. I put the phone down; this was very distracting news. Luckily, there was a rest stop just ahead. After pulling over I read the Facebook message, then checked my e-mail. There was a message on the CayugaBirds listserv from Janet Akin saying that her sister had a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch at her feeders on Tug Hill. Meanwhile birders on Facebook were talking about the bird, getting contact information, and making plans to drive to Lewis County the next morning. E-mails with additional information soon appeared on several listservs. Add to this the fact that Nancy Loomis identified the bird by sending her photographs to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Facebook page, and you have proof extraordinaire that the future of birding communication is in social media.*

Donna L. Schulman, Queens, NY.



## PHOTO GALLERY

### Spring 2012



Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Leyden, *Lewis*, 5 Mar 12, © Corey Finger. This bird, NY's second documented record pending review by NYSARC, is discussed in this issue in an article on pp. 212-214, and in the *Highlights of the Season* and the Region 6 spring report.