

NESTING OF THE EVENING GROSBEAK IN NORTHERN
MICHIGAN.

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Plate XVIII.

THE breeding range of the typical form of the Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina vespertina*) is at present very imperfectly known. There are records of birds seen in summer in Alberta, Manitoba, Minnesota, and extreme western Ontario, and of young not yet fully fledged in both Alberta and Manitoba; but the only fully authentic nest found is one discovered by Mr. S. S. Stansell about thirty miles northwest of Edmonton, Alberta. The writer's discovery of five nests of this species in northern Michigan is therefore of much interest.

Evening Grosbeaks are found to be fairly common in favored sections of Michigan in fall, winter, and early spring, but disappear with the approach of the nesting season. Flocks of these forest dwellers were observed in November, 1920, in the Taquamenaw River district, Northern Peninsula of Michigan, to which locality they were evidently attracted by the heavy beech mast. The birds were generally observed earnestly feeding in the top branches of the hardwood trees. Observation and inquiry in the summer of 1921 gave no hope of finding the birds nesting, and it was, therefore, an agreeable surprise when, in July, 1922, a nesting colony was located on Whitefish Point, Lake Superior, about 20 miles from the Canadian shore.

It is fitting that a place so far-famed as Whitefish Point should be selected as a nesting place by these elusive wanderers, but from available information it seems that they had never before, during the recollection of present inhabitants, so favored it. The site chosen is an impressive and interesting one and truly in harmony with the beauty and dignity of the birds. The beauty of the northern woods, especially where the white pine grew, has been greatly impaired by lumbering, not only as a result of the removal of the trees, but because, where extensive lumbering was done, forest fires invariably followed the logging. It is not improbable that the cutting of the pines influenced the birds that might have

previously nested there to abandon the region in favor of more suitable conditions farther north; or may we hope that they are extending their breeding range, as other species are doing in the same region?

The white pine grove proper, where the birds were nesting, covers little more than an acre of ground and is situated only a few hundred feet from the roaring waves of Lake Superior, while Norway pines fill in the gap and extend the grove to the very shores of the lake. Adjacent to the west for some distance is a scattered growth of small jack pines, and to the eastward and southeastward the land is a little more broken, and largely covered at the present time, by a new growth of hardwood and conifers. In winter, this spot is one of the coldest places throughout the Northeast, and the summers are always cool.

Upon reaching the grove late in the afternoon of July 28, my attention was attracted by the familiar whistle of the Grosbeaks. A friend advised me that the birds were nesting in the grove. Search was immediately begun for nests and five were located, four in white pines and one in a Norway pine. No effort was made to examine three of the nests, as they were difficult of access, high up and well out toward the ends of frail limbs. It was evident that the young were out of most of the nests. The muffled note of a bird, evidently that of one of the young Grosbeaks, attracted my attention. The little invalid, as it proved to be, was located on the ground, in the rank weeds underneath one of the nests. As it was approached the female bird showed up and nervously hopped and flew from limb to limb uttering the clear, pleading whistle common to the species. The nest from which the young birds had fallen was about 25 feet up on a horizontal limb of a white pine, well concealed by small branches and needles. This particular young bird had been attacked probably by a red squirrel, either in the nest or after it had fallen to the ground, and the left wing was entirely eaten off.

As the writer climbed to the nest from which the young bird had fallen, another young of the same size left the nest and hopped off into the thick needles and branches of the tree. The parent bird became more concerned when the nest was approached and fussed about, barely out of reach. Three other Grosbeaks darted

in, alighting on a near-by tree, and displayed some interest in the situation but did not make any move to assist the parent bird in her efforts to defend the nest and young. After the writer returned to the ground the female bird again took up an attentive watch over the afflicted one, which had been placed on a branch of a small pine (see Plate XVIII).

The nest examined was practically indistinguishable from nests of the Black-headed Grosbeak of the West, being almost, if not quite, as frail of construction. The body of the nest was composed of hard, clean sticks and lined with black and brown hair-like rootlets, with a sprinkling of moss between the outer body and lining.

The other nest inspected was in a Norway pine that stood about fifty feet north of the tree that contained the nest just described. This nest was also about twenty-five feet from the ground near the drooping end of one of the lowest limbs on the tree. It contained three young almost ready to leave the nest. The young were not disturbed and no adult birds were near while the investigation of the nest was being made, the parents very likely being away at the time. No doubt there were more nests than were located, but the trees were rather dense while the evasive nature of the birds prevented any clue as to exact locations. It is probable that a dozen pairs were nesting in the grove. On July 29, a few Grosbeaks were observed in some white pines half a mile southeast of the grove, and it is likely that these trees also contained nests.

The strong tendency toward association previously noted in this species was manifest among the breeding birds. The dominant note was the clear whistle, although a low conversational twitter could be heard when several were together in the trees. Their action, as is always the case, was deliberate; from four to eight would appear without warning, dash into a tree, remain for a few minutes and disappear as suddenly, but generally with a warning note or two that the flight was to be resumed.

After leaving Whitefish Point, July 29, no more Evening Grosbeaks were seen, although the writer was almost constantly traveling through the wilder sections of the region, until September 16, when fifteen were observed on a telegraph wire, within a few rods of the depot, in the little village of Nestoria, Northern Peninsula of Michigan.



1. Nesting Tree of Evening Grosbeak.



EVENING GROSBEEK.

2. Young of Evening Grosbeak.