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## The Black-headed Grosbeak

(*Zamelodia melanocephala*)

BY WILLIAM LOVELL FINLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY HERMAN T. BOHLMAN



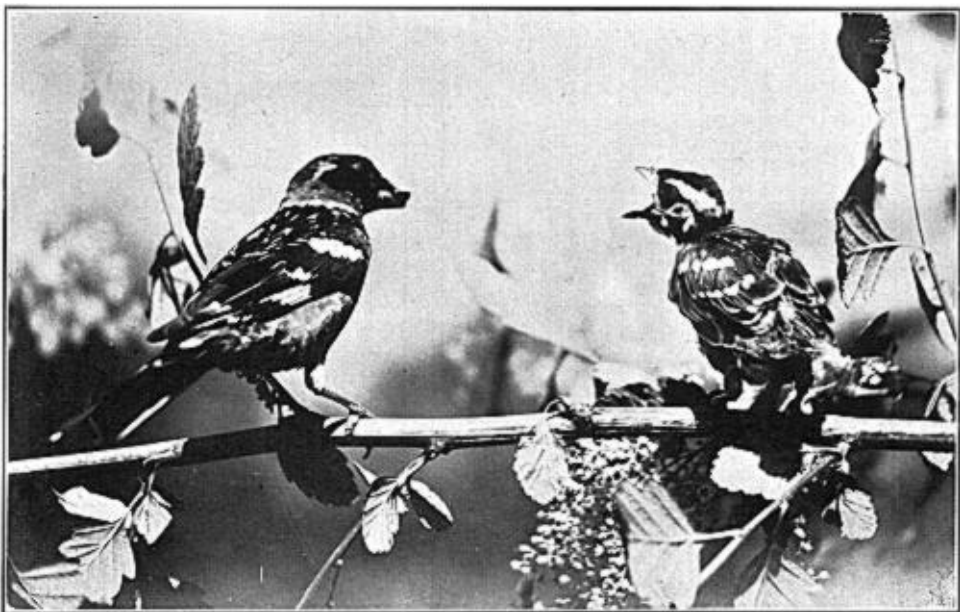
I SHALL always remember the black-headed grosbeak because it is one of the birds of my childhood. As long ago as I can remember, I watched for him in the mulberry trees and about the elderberry bushes when the fruit was ripe. I distinguished him from all others by his high-pitched, "quit! quit!" long before I knew his name. He is a common resident of California. When I came to Oregon, it was some time before I found him. Here he seldom if ever comes about the city, but he likes a quiet nook out in the hills, a place where the maples and alders form a thicket in the creek bottom.

For several years we have watched a pair of grosbeaks that spent their summer in a little thicket along Fulton Creek. I have no doubt the same pair has returned to the old nesting place for the last three or four years. It seems I can almost recognize the notes of their song. If our ears were only tuned to the music of the birds could we not recognize them as we recognize our old friends?

Last year I found three spotted eggs in a loosely-made nest that was placed in the dog-wood. This year the site was scarcely twenty feet from the old home. They came nearer the ground and placed the thin frame-work of their home be-

tween the two upright forks of an arrow-wood bush. We had never bothered them very much with the camera, but when they put their home right down within four feet and a half of the ground, it looked to me as if they wanted some pictures taken. It was too good a chance for us to miss.

When I waded through the ferns and pressed aside the bushes, the nest was full to the brim. Above the rim I could see the white fluff wavering in a breath of air. I stole up and looked in. The three bantlings were sound asleep. Neither parent happened to be near. I crawled back and hid well down in the bushes twelve feet away. The father came in as silent as a shadow and rested on the nest's edge. He was a beauty. He had a shiny black head, black wings crossed with bars of white, and the rich red-brown of his breast shaded into lemon-yellow toward the tail. He crammed something in each wide open mouth. The mother was right at his heels. She treated each bobbing head in the same way. Then,



MALE GROSBEAK ABOUT TO FEED YOUNG

with head cocked on the side she looked each youngster over, turning him gently with her head.

The weather was warm and it seemed to me the young grosbeaks grew almost fast enough to rival a toad-stool. Sunshine makes a big difference. These little fellows got plenty to eat and were where the sun filtered through the leaves and kept them warm. The young thrushes across the gully were in a dark spot. They got as much food but they rarely got a glint of the sun. They didn't grow as much in a week as the grosbeak babies did in three days.

I liked to sit and watch the brilliant male. He perched on the top branches of the fir and stretched his wings till you could see their lemon lining. He preened his tail to show the hidden spots of white. What roundelays he whistled "Whit-te-o! Whit-te-o! Reet!" Early in the morning he showed the quality of his singing. Later in the day it often lost finish. The notes sounded hard to get out,

or as if he were practising, just running over the keys of an air that hung dim in his memory. But it was pleasing to hear him practise; the atmosphere was too lazy to call for perfect execution.

The morning of July sixth, the three young birds left the nest, following their parents out into the limbs of the surrounding bushes. They were not able to fly more than a few feet but they knew how to perch and call for food. I never heard a more enticing dinner song. It was such a sweet, musical "tour-a-lee."

The parents fed their bantlings as much on berries as on worms and insects. Once I saw the father distribute a whole mouthful of green measuring worms. The next time he had visited a garden down the hillside, for he brought one raspberry in his bill and coughed up three more. Both birds soon got over their mad anxiety every time we looked at the youngsters. In fact, they soon seemed willing enough



FEMALE GROSBK AT NEST

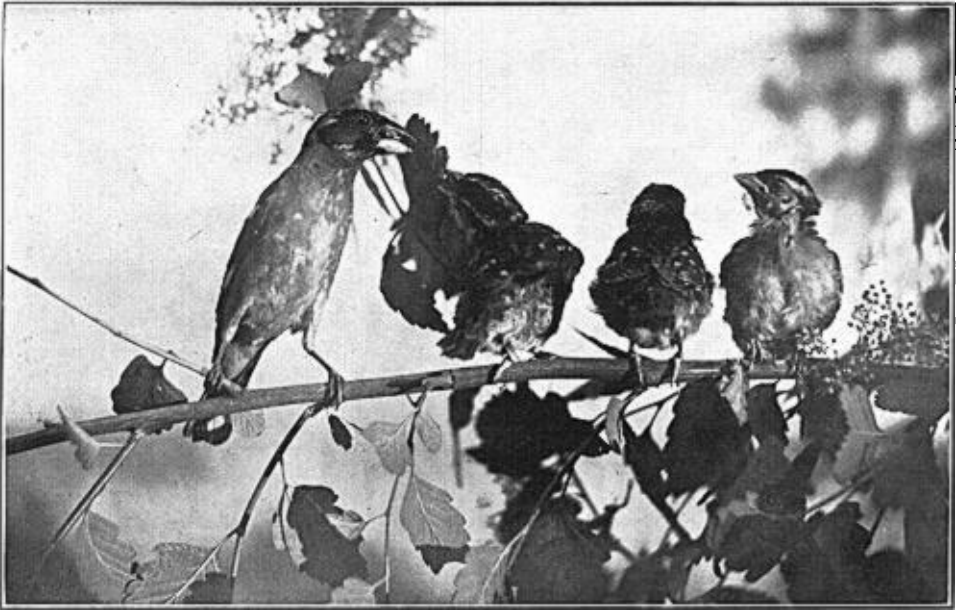
to have the birdlings share the bits from our own lunch.

We spent the next two days watching and photographing. It took all the next morning, however, to find the three bantlings. The mother had enticed one down the creek to some hazel bushes. I watched her for two hours before I heard the soft whistle of the youngster. He perched on my finger and I brought him back to the nest. Another was found down in the thimbleberry bushes. This one, with the third up in the maple saplings over the nest, seemed to be in the keeping of the father.

After watching them all day we put them in a little isolated clump of bushes late in the afternoon, and when we went early the next morning they were still there but perched well up on the top limbs. The parents had become quite tame, and paid little attention either to the camera or to us. By the fourth day, how-

ever, the young grosbeaks were beyond the reach of the camera. Their wings had developed strength and they were beginning to hunt for themselves.

*Portland, Oregon.*



MALE GROSBK AND THREE YOUNG

Extracts from Some Montana Note-books, 1904

BY P. M. SILLOWAY

**W**ILLOW Thicket, Spring Creek, Lewistown. Mont. May 7.—A most distressing event occurred today in our usually quiet little grove, an event that occurs annually about this time, though, and tonight I am mourning the loss of embryonic offspring. It was a magnificent setting, although it was the traditional unlucky number thirteen. I might have known, experienced old magpie that I am, it would turn out unlucky for me, and I should have stopped at the number twelve, as I did last year; but now it seems that my treasured thirteen is to rest on a cottony bed beside my lost twelve of last year. Today that same voracious egg-hog, genus *Homo*, called Silloway, came wandering through the thicket. I was sitting quietly in my earthen cot, meditating on the numerous cares awaiting me as the proud mother of thirteen infants, when a rude shock at base of the small hawk I had chosen for my home site caused me to flit from the nest. The *Homo* collector hurried up to my snug tenement, anchored himself among the many thorns which beset the surrounding branches, adjusted a cigar box in front of him, and began to remove one by one my precious clutch. There is no thorn without its rose, however, and even in my distress it was amusing to watch him try to pack thirteen eggs with cotton intended for only nine eggs, in a space intended for only nine eggs. He stretched every bit of cotton to its utmost capacity, poked unwrapped eggs into cavities between wrapped eggs, and finally worked his way down in an apparent condition of hilarious bewilderment. Here-