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NOTES ON BEHAVIOR AND MOLT OF A CAPTIVE EVENING GROSBEEK

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On December 29, 1951, a flock of Evening Grosbeaks was feeding along a road a few hundred yards from my home in Etna, N. Y. While most cars slowed down and avoided the flock, one car went through at a high rate of speed, killing two birds and injuring another. The injured bird could flutter, but two of us succeeded in catching him in the deep snow. Refusing all food at first, he finally took red raspberries which I had in the home freezer, then blackberries and finally sunflower seeds. After that he refused most fruit and for a year ate almost nothing except sunflower seeds. Then he accepted apple, but not in quantity, and he never again ate berries. I fully expected to release him if he recovered the use of his wing, which was broken close to the body, but it healed in a stiffened condition and he could never fly. I had him for 15 months, and he died quite suddenly the night of March 27, 1953.

In all that time, he never became tame nor overcame his apparent fear of me. Often when I opened the door of the cage, he became panicky and would fall on his back, unable to right himself because of the stiffened wing.

As is the case with the wild birds, he drank quantities of water, and if the cup became empty, I was soon aware of it because of his increased restlessness and calling. As soon as I filled the cup, he drank.

Throughout the first few months I had him, he called frequently and he seemed to be aware of the flock feeding in the yard. The second winter he called less frequently. There were no wild Grosbeaks in Etna that winter, but I do not know that his silence was related to this fact.

His plumage was normal, except for cage wear of the tail feathers and of the primaries on the broken wing, which dragged. By July 29, 1952, I noted that half of the primaries had molted. By the last week in August, he was replacing the contour feathers and also some of the wing coverts. The molt of the primaries seemed to have slowed up, for on September 5 the three outer primaries on each wing had not yet been replaced. Molt of the secondaries started the 2nd week in October. On October 29, all the new primaries were full grown except the first, which did not drop until November 1st, when the tail molt was likewise almost complete.

At the time of his death in March 1953, four of the secondaries were found to be new ones, but the last two and the old tertiaries were still retained. This was evident not only because of the slight difference in color and wear but also because I had "stamped" the white area on the wing the previous April and some of this red mark still showed at this date, almost a year later.

His coloring was much duller than that of wild birds of this time of year. He showed some indication of bright yellow but his general body color was grayish or olive-brown, and much duller than the year before. This may have been due to diet and to captivity, or it may support Parks' thesis (1947) that the more mature male birds are less colorful.

Dwight (1900) says that juvenals have a partial post-juvinal molt, **not involving wings** or tail, and the first nuptial plumage is acquired by wear. He also states that there is a complete post-nuptial molt to get the winter plumage and that the succeeding nuptial plumages are acquired by wear. Magee (1928) however states that there is at least a partial spring molt, involving mostly cervix, occiput and rump.

While I do not know that the Grosbeak was a bird of the year when I got him, I am inclined to think so and the fact that there was no molt during the first few months I had him would seem to bear this out, if Dwight is correct in regard to the juvinal molt. But since the molt the next year continued into March, it would seem that Dwight was in error in respect to the time of the molt of the tertiaries and some of the secondaries of the adult and that Magee was correct in finding some evidence of molt in the spring.

One of the most unusual incidents in regard to this captive was that in the first few months of captivity he wore off the theca and badly damaged the premaxillary bone of the upper mandible, by a nervous habit of running his bill up and down between the wires of the cage and bumping it against the horizontal supporting wires. I wove strips of cloth in and out around the wires, but it was too late to help. Eventually the upper mandible was worn down to a thin shelf-like piece which bent when he cracked seeds, and there was a sizeable hole into the nasal fossa. It all healed over nicely, but there was never any regeneration such as may occur when a break is less serious at the tip of the bill, or involves only the theca.

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