

# Rose-breasted Grosbeaks

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On 8 May 1984 a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Phœnicurus ludovicianus*) appeared on our second floor window feeder (NABB Vol. 3:107) which contains only sunflower seed. Although this was unusual, we thought the bird to be just passing through.

A male appeared again 9 May and then was joined by two more males on 10 May. Our cameras were clicking. By 12 May, several more males and a female joined the group. By 16 May, six males and three females were noted. Research of all our available books indicated that our habitat and location were unusual. Sunflower was not listed in the food requirements.

Potter traps were set on the feeders and after the desire for the seed overcame their leeryness, eight grosbeaks were banded  $\frac{1}{M}$  on 17 May two SY-M and one AHY-M; on 18 May, three AHY-F and two AHY-M. Fearing that we might be interfering with the visits, we removed the traps since none of the banded birds seemed to be returning to feed.

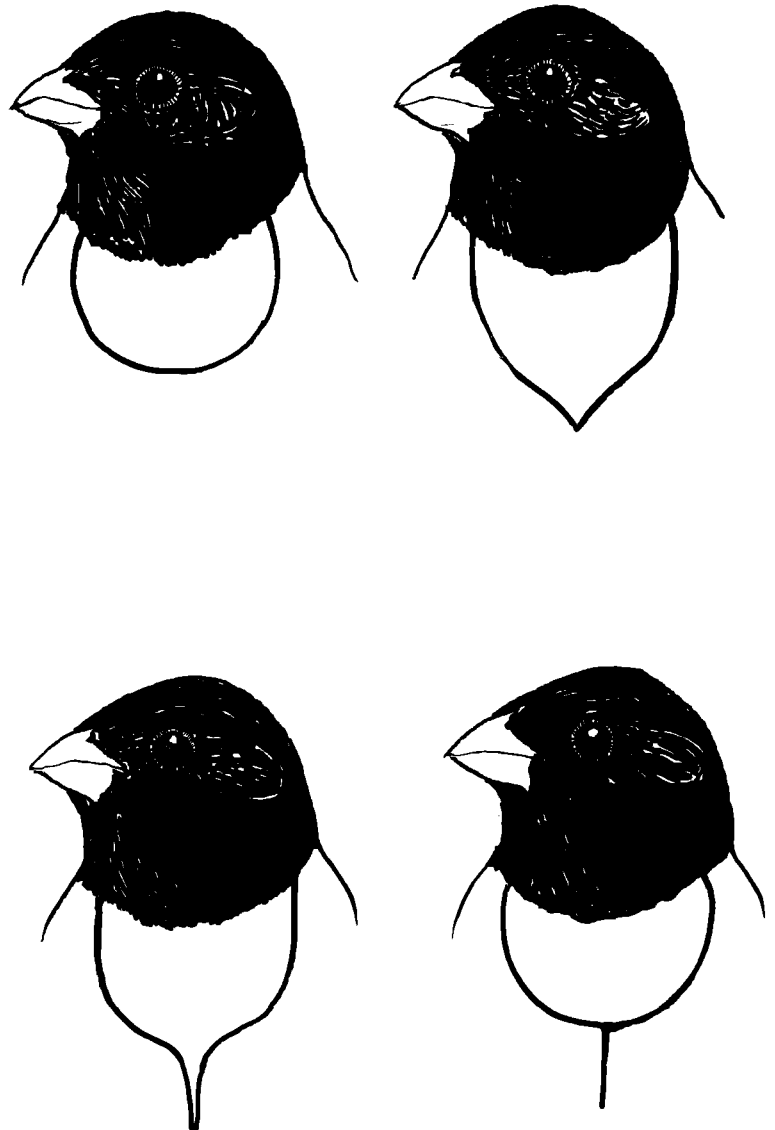
During the two days of trapping, 16 cowbirds (5F), 13 Blue Jays, 20 Purple Finches, and 1 Black-capped Chickadee were banded.

Notes kept through the following days indicate at least two males and one female (unbanded) added to the number of grosbeaks. At least two were noted in the feeders every day. Of interest was that cowbirds seemed to accompany the grosbeaks to the feeder; however, if a Blue Jay landed on the feeder, the male grosbeak would chase it away, but the female did not seem to be as spooky, complacently eating no matter what other birds might be on the feeder.

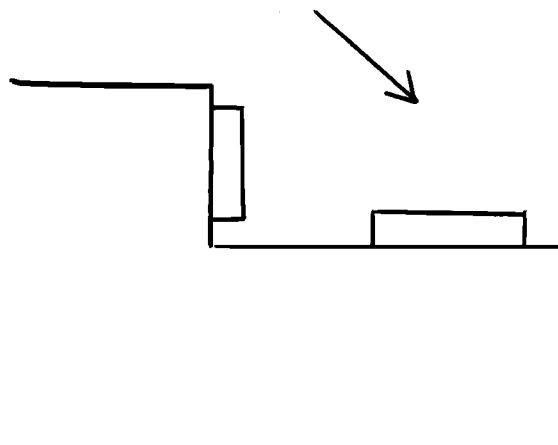
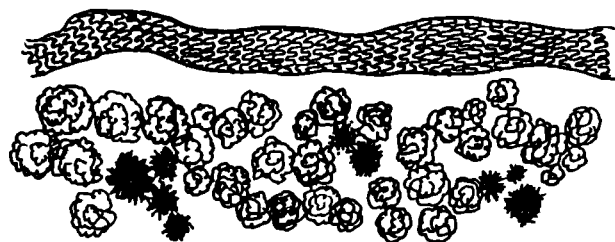
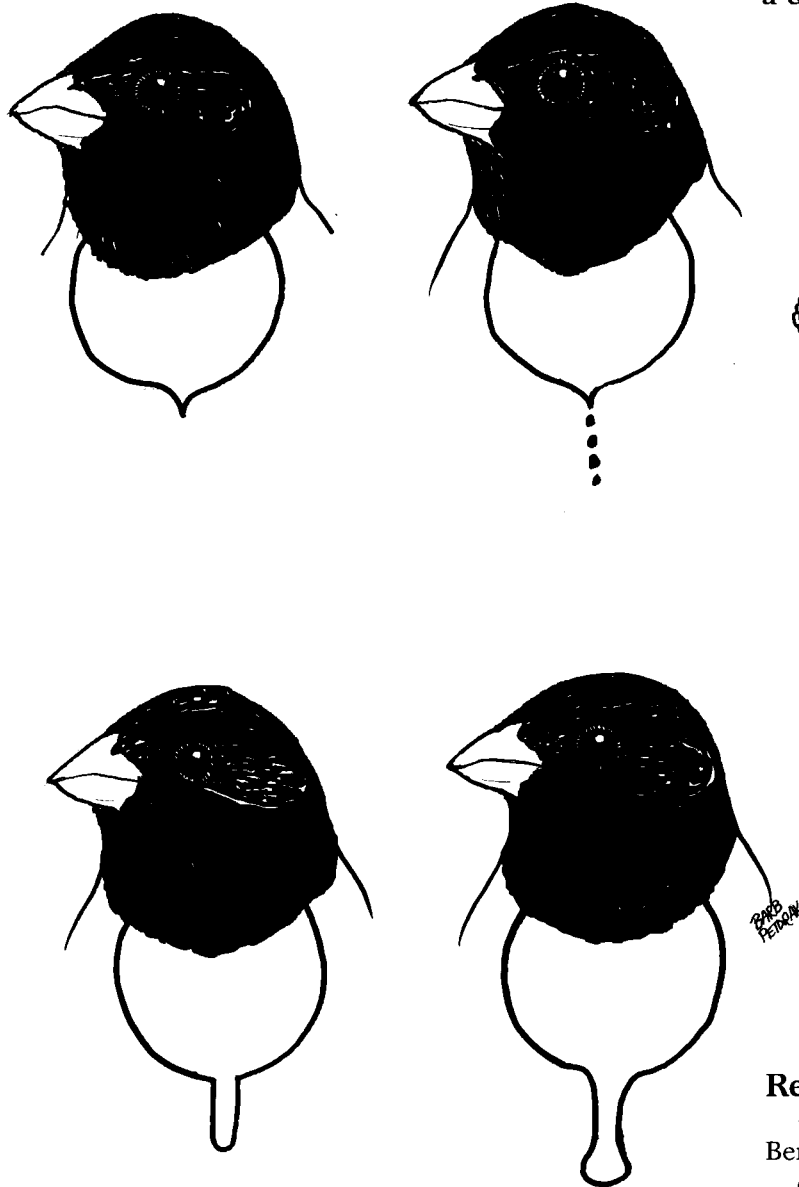
One to four males and one female continued to visit the feeders daily, some still without bands. On 3 June, four weeks after the first sightings, the potter traps were again in place. Three additional birds were banded: One SY-M, one AHY-M, one AHY-F (with brood patch).

On 6 June, a female on nest was found approximately 25 feet up in a hardwood tree. On 7 June, a Bermuda high sent temperatures soaring into the 90's and the results of the Maple Leaf Cutworm could be seen. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks had all but deserted the feeders but could be seen gleaning in the trees.

The grosbeaks started to return for sunflower seed 19 June. At least three females (one banded on the left leg, one banded on the right leg, one unbanded) and at least four males (distinguished by the pattern of the rose breasts) were seen throughout the following days. Male breast patterns varied from a distinct "cowl" type cutoff to an elongated "run" of color  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide down to the belly. Not realizing that the extent of the rose coloring in the breast might be an additional indication of age, no accurate record was kept other than drawing sketches of all the different patterns (figure 2).



- a & b window feeders
- c mature mountain maples with a few hemlocks & pines
- d swiftly moving brook



## References

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- Dwight, Jonathan Jr., Sequence of Plumages & Moults of the Passerine Birds of New York. NY Academy of Sciences, NY. 1975. p. 208.
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On 17 July one additional bird was banded as HY-U.

1985 update: 2 May, a male noticed in the garden two weeks earlier than last year.

6 May, three males, two females on the feeder.

19 May, traps are out. Three retraps; one new banding, SY-M.

We have noted that not only the grosbeaks but almost all of the bigger birds seem to favor one feeder over another: feeder a in the diagram below. The smaller birds seem to favor feeder b but are banded on both feeders. The feeders are identical except for the direction they face.