Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Bright-colored males of this species are one of the most discernible springtime birds. A trademark rose-red triangle on their chest, set against a black and white body, makes them stand out. The female is less colorful than the male, and is often mistaken for an overgrown sparrow.

Farmers appreciate the presence of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks because they devour scores of beetles, locusts, cankerworms, tent caterpillars, tussock moths, gypsy moths, and other insect pests, picking them from tree foliage and from the ground.

Interesting Facts:

Family: Cardinalinae

Scientific Name: *Pheuticus ludovivianus*

Location: In the breeding season, they range from northeastern British Columbia to east across Quebec and Nova Scotia. They also range south along the northeastern U.S. seaboard to New Jersey and within the mountain regions south to Georgia, and as far southwest as Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

Migration: As early as late summer in the northern ranges, these grosbeaks migrate south to an area that spans central Mexico, Central America and northern South America. They form winter flocks of up to 20 in plantations and clearings.

Nesting: Males help females construct the nests, which are loosely built of twigs and lined with fine twigs, rootlets, fur, and hair. Cup-shaped nests are found in trees, usually within 20 ft. from ground. Around mid-May to June, the female lays 3-5 pale green, bluish-green eggs, with brown or purple markings. Both sexes incubate the eggs, which usually takes 13-14 days. Young leave the nest after 9-12 days. If a second brood is started, males incubate the first while females build the second nest.

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Diet:	Their diets are split equally between animal and plant matter during the breeding season, consisting of insects, seeds, fruit, buds, and some flowers. Grosbeaks pick insects from tree foliage and extract from the ground. Females tend to forage higher off the ground than males.
Size and Color:	Grosbeaks are 7 to 8-1/2" long with a wingspan of 12-13". Males are black on the head, chin, and back. Wings and tail are black with white markings. The conspicuous rose-red patch on their breast and under their wings is a chief identifier. The male bill is grayish white. Females resemble an overgrown sparrow or finch. Their upper bodies are brown with buff-edged feathers. Their wings and tail are brown with white markings, while the lining of the wings is yellowish brown to pinkish. There is a white line over their eyes and their bill is yellowish white.
Song:	Both the male and female are beautiful songsters, with a melody resembling the robin's. However, the notes of the grosbeak are more hurried than the robin's. The female grosbeak's song is shorter and softer than the male's. Males sing in flight while pursing females in courtship, and both sexes sing while nesting.
Special Characteristics:	• The male plays a large role in nesting, helping to build the nest and incubate the eggs. • When double brooded, males care for fledged young. • Grosbeaks have a massive bill, which helps them pick insects from tree branches.
Attracting:	Grosbeaks are attracted to thick brush, large trees near open areas, marsh borders, overgrown pastures, and orchards. In urban areas, they seek gardens, parks, and cemeteries. They also eat from feeders, and are especially fond of black-oil and striped sunflower seeds.
Life Span:	9+ years in the wild.

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