

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*



Folk Name: Balsam Bird

Status: Migrant

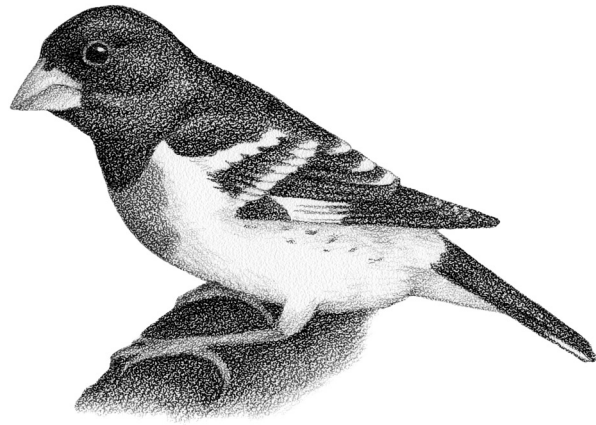
Abundance: Uncommon to Fairly Common

Habitat: Medium to mature hardwood forests, wooded residential areas

The adult male Rose-breasted Grosbeak is an exceptionally handsome bird. It has a black hood covering its head, a stout whitish bill, and a vivid triangle of red situated on its white breast. Its body is black, its rump and belly white, and it displays a bold white patch at the base of the primary feathers on each wing. Overall, this bird has an impressive and distinctive look, and it is an easy bird to learn to identify. The drab brownish female is much less distinctive, but a glance at its yellow wing linings, streaked breast, white wing bars, the size of its bill, and its boldly striped head, should help clinch the identification. The call of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak is a diagnostic “sharp eek” that is easy to learn as well. It is often heard during migration.

On April 23, 1928, William McIlwaine spied a male in Charlotte and wrote: “I confess I was stirred by a sight of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. This fellow is truly a dandy. His suit is striking black and white, with breast and under-wing coverts of bright rosy red. His wife is quite plain-looking, dresses like a large striped sparrow.”

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds in forests in the mountains of North Carolina from about 3,500 feet in elevation to about 5,000 feet in elevation. It has not been confirmed breeding in the mountains of South Carolina or anywhere in the Piedmont or Coastal Plain of the Carolinas. It winters far to the south of the United States.

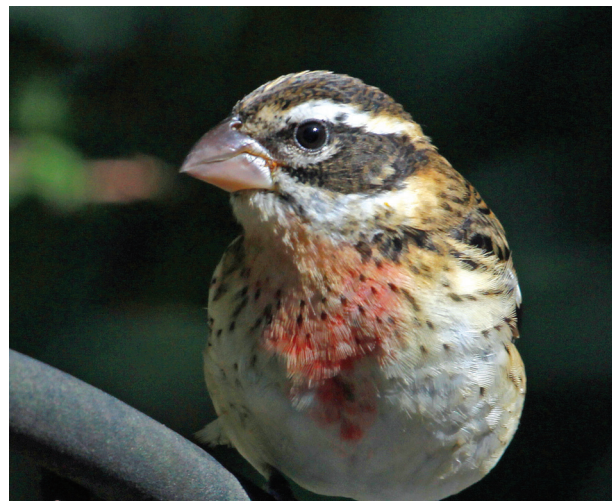


It is an uncommon to fairly common bird in the Carolina Piedmont during spring and fall migration becoming less common as one moves eastward away from the Foothills.

In this region during spring migration, males usually arrive a few days before the females. Most move through from mid-April through mid-May. Our extreme spring dates are 6 April through 24 May. Mark Simpson published two reports of this bird found on the western edge of this region during the month of June. An adult male was observed at 2,600 feet on Poore’s Knob in the Brushy Mountains in June 1963. Simpson found a male singing near Skull Knob in the South Mountains in Rutherford County on June 16, 1970, at an elevation of 2,800 feet. We have no other acceptable records from the months of June and July.



Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. (Will Stuart)



First-fall male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. (Jim Guyton)

Fall birds generally move through from mid-September through mid-October. Fall migrants have been sighted as early as 23 August. We have four records from November, and one was photographed on Moss Lake on November 23, 2014. We have one report of a lingering male visiting a feeder in Gaston County from 5–6 December.

Our peak one-day count is 27 tallied on a Spring Bird

Count in 1984. Our peak count at one location is a total of 15 reported by Dwayne Martin at Baker's Mountain Park on April 25, 2004. Martin wrote: "All I can say is WOW!!! I had the best morning of spring birding I have ever had in Catawba County and I didn't even leave the parking lot!!! At one time there were FIVE male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks on the feeders and 10+ in the trees singing!!"