

788-01-1995

**BLACK HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)
WEXFORD - ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PA, NOVEMBER 12, 1995**

BY MIKE FIALKOVICH

On the afternoon of 12 November, 1995, I received a call from Joyce Hoffmann about a possible Black-headed Grosbeak at Wexford in Allegheny County, in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

A gentleman by the name of Regis Schultz saw the bird coming to his feeder since some time in September, and had some difficulty contacting local birders to verify his observation. Joyce was contacted by our local Audubon Society staff who received the call from Regis, and she called him on 12 November to obtain further information. Based on their conversation we decided that Regis knew what he was seeing, as he compared it to other birds at his feeding station such as Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) and Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), and he stated that he had photographs to prove that the bird was something unusual.

With that information, Joyce and I drove over to his home, and Regis graciously invited us in to watch the feeding station from his kitchen and dining room windows. The first thing he did was hand us several photographs of the bird. Although the bird was far from filling the frame, we could tell immediately that it was indeed an adult male Black-headed Grosbeak. It was perched on the feeder in the photographs. We arrived at approximately 2:30 p.m. and the bird appeared briefly at approximately 3:15 p.m. It was perched on a large spruce tree just outside the kitchen window, and was clearly an adult male Black-headed Grosbeak. We observed the bird for 15 - 20 seconds before it flew into the upper branches of the tree.

About 30 minutes later we saw the bird fly into the upper branches of the spruce tree but could not see it perched. Apparently it came from the woods across the road from Regis' house.

Several minutes later the bird reappeared, again perched in the spruce tree just outside the window. Joyce, Regis, and I observed the bird as it perched for 45 to 60 seconds, and once again it retreated to the upper branches of the tree. I attempted to photograph the bird at this point, but there was very little light, so the photograph will probably be blurred. The grosbeak was so close that we didn't need binoculars to view it clearly; our eyes were good enough.

We did not see the bird after that and we departed at sunset. Both Joyce and I have seen Black-headed Grosbeaks in Arizona so we are familiar with the species.

DESCRIPTION:

The following description was written at the site, just after the final viewing of the bird.

- Head: black.
- Bill: large, conical "finch" bill, gray.
- Breast, sides and belly dull orange. The orange color was similar to the breast color of a male American Robin, and very unlike the bright orange of a male Baltimore Oriole. The belly appeared to be colored like that of the breast, even though the field guides I consulted afterward showed the belly to be whitish.
- Back: the same orange as the other parts of the bird with heavy black streaking.
- Tail: black above. I did not see the underside of the tail.

- Wings: black with three white patches: one just below the shoulder (approximately the same location as the yellowish band under the red epaulet of a male red-winged blackbird), short and wide. The middle white patch consisted of a series of small flecks (white tips of the greater coverts) that formed a narrow wingbar. The third patch formed a spot in the middle of the primaries in the folded wing--a pocket hankerchief effect like that seen on a Black-throated Blue Warbler.
- Neck: dull orange as the other areas mentioned above. The orange ran up from the nape, along the side of the head to just behind the eye, forming a streak that ended in a point. This streak did not reach the eye.
- Size: about the same size and build as a Rose-breasted Grosbeak; a large, plump finch.

In flight the bird flashed white patches in the wings and tail.

I could not see the rump as it was covered by the folded wings.

There are three other Allegheny County records of Black-headed Grosbeak: 22 September, 1968 in Penn Hills, 19 September, 1970 in Monroeville, and 17 April, 1974, location unknown (Hess, pers. comm.). There are 12 records statewide from winter and spring (Santer *et al.*, 1992).

References:

National Geographic Society. 1987. Field Guide to the birds of North America. Second Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington D.C.

Peterson, R.T. 1980. A Field Guide To The Birds Of Eastern And Central North America. Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Santer, S.J., D.W. Brauning, G. Schwalbe, P.W. Schwalbe. 1992. Annotated list of the Birds Of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Biological Survey Contribution Number Four. Ornithological Technical Committee.

141 Comrie Avenue
Braddock, PA 15104

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Black-headed Grosbeak (Pheucticus melanocephalus)**

Date of Sighting: **12 November 1995 to 7 May 1996**

Location: **WEXFORD**

County: **ALLEGHENY**

Observer(s): **Mike Fialkovich**

Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: **1995**

Submitted by: **Mike Fialkovich**

Written Description: **YES** Photo: **YES** Specimen: **NO**

Recording: **NONE**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas	X							
N. Pulcinella	X							
E. Kwater	X							
R. Ickes	X							
G. McWilliams	X							
P. Schwalbe	X							
S. Feldstein	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

F C Haas

Date:

2-22-97