

790-01-1992

Blue Grosbeak
Westmoreland County
Margaret A. Higbee

On 11 June 1992 my husband, Roger, and I were running our Parkwood BBS route. At Stop 46 at 0847, before stepping from the car, I heard a bird's song that I did not recognize. The song sounded similar in pattern to that of a House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) but it was more subdued, not as coarse, and reminded me vaguely of a cross between a Purple Finch (*C. purpureus*) and an Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*). Realizing that I needed to see this bird, I quickly located a male Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*) perched atop a low hedgerow about 100 feet from me. Roger stepped from the car and also observed the bird. We continued with our BBS route. During the remainder of the three-minute stop, the grosbeak hopped around on the ground with a flock of Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) within 75 feet of the car.

The adult male Blue Grosbeak appeared completely dark as he was backlit by the sun while perched in the hedgerow. The largeness of the bill and the overall shape of the bird were immediately apparent. When he flew to the ground, he appeared completely blue except for the noticeable chestnut wingbars. The area around its bill appeared darker. The bill itself appeared light. I was not certain whether the bill was actually light in color or whether this was a factor of sunlight reflecting off the bill's surface. The bird was seen in full sunlight with no wind.

On 12 June 1992 at 0530, Greg Cook, Linda Wagner, and I returned to the area to observe the bird again. Again, before any of us had stepped from the car, we heard him singing. He was perched in a Black Locust about 25 feet from the car. Occasionally, he would twitch his tail, then fly off to another

perch to sing. He repeatedly returned to the locust tree. We again observed him on the ground with grackles. We spent 45 minutes in the area watching him fly from perch to perch and sing. His perches were mostly within 150 yards of the locust tree. At one point early in our observations, we saw a brown bird low in a shrub near the locust that appeared to be a female. She hopped up to him as he sat about 4 feet up in the locust, but they both were concealed by the low vegetation. I did not see the female well, but there was little doubt in my mind that it was a female Blue Grosbeak because of its behavior. She hopped down again out of sight, and he continued to sing. Several minutes later he returned to the locust; again she appeared, but this time they flew off together. We saw him several more times, but we did not see the female again.

On 11 July 1992 I returned to the area at 0730 with Gloria Winger and Florence Emmonds. I had hoped to confirm breeding. We immediately heard the grosbeak's song and spotted him within three minutes of our arrival. We spent 1½ hours in the area observing the male. At no time did we see a female. In addition, his flights from the original locust had increased in distance. He now ventured 300 yards in a variety of directions. He seemed to be singing more energetically than before, almost as though he were advertising for a mate. We hoped to see him carrying food, but he seemed intent on only feeding himself and singing.

This area is within 1½ miles of the Conemaugh River in Westmoreland County near Blairsville. The surrounding area is composed of agricultural fields, planted in corn and oats. This area has recently been strip mined with an unreclaimed area hidden from the road by the embankment on which the above-mentioned locust is situated. The topography here is gently rolling, but the immediate vicinity is very flat with few

trees. Adjacent to the cornfield is a low hedgerow where several observers commented that he seemed to spend a lot of time. The bird spent a large block of its time in the immediate area surrounding the locust.

The female had also been observed by Bob Mulvihill on 11 June 1992 and by Alice Beatty, Gloria Lamer, and Georgette Syster on 12 June. The male has been observed by 25+ birders including Ed Kwater. The last sighting of which I am aware was 19 July by Becky Byerly.

RR 2, Box 166
Indiana, PA 15701

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*)

Date of Sighting: 11 June 1992 to 19 July 1992

Location: NEAR BLAIRSVILLE

County: WESTMORELAND

Observer(s): Margaret Higbee

Date of Submission: 1992

Submitted by: Margaret Higbee

Written Description: YES Photo: NO 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					
J. Skinner			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J. C. Haas

Date:

4-21-94