

THE EVENING GROSBEEK (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) at ARNPRIOR, ONT.

BY A. L. GORMLEY.

During the past few years bird-lovers of eastern Canada and the north-eastern United States have enjoyed an annual winter visit from the Evening Grosbeak, one of the most interesting and most beautiful species of our boreal birds. For five consecutive years, from 1912-13 to 1916-17, it was a regular winter resident at Arnprior, sometimes coming in large numbers, and I had every opportunity of observing and studying its habits. I distinctly remember having seen the Evening Grosbeak before 1912, but being a boy at that time, I had not sufficient interest in birds to keep records of their going and coming. During the winter, when avian life is little in evidence, the beautiful plumage and robin-like call of the Evening Grosbeak is sufficient to attract the attention of the most unobservant person, and many were the explanations given for their presence at this season, when all birds are commonly supposed to be happily sojourning in the sunny south, free from scarcity-of-fuel problems. One man who spoke to me about them, even went so far as to say that he thought they were European birds driven from their native home by the war; while another stated that he was certain the birds of this country had greatly changed since the time he was a boy. Such distinguished visitors at once gained the good-will of all nature-lovers and several people succeeded in getting them to come to their bird "cafeterias" to feed.

While here they feed almost exclusively on the fruit of the Manitoba maple (*Negundo aceroides*) and occasionally visit the sumacs. They eat a lot of snow, and I have often seen them fly to the rain-gutters on houses, presumably looking for water. Although they are somewhat pugnacious during the winter, they become much more so when spring arrives. At this season they also become much livelier and spend considerable time flying after one another, generally the males after the females. Compared to the Hermit Thrush or some of our more brilliant songsters, I have never heard anything from the Evening Grosbeak that could properly be called a song, but during the month of May especially, they certainly make a lot of noise, the whole flock usually "singing" together. Following the general rule, however, in regard to bright plumaged birds, it seems that nature has not endowed them with any great gift of song. As the snow disappears, they eagerly search the ground for bits of gravel, etc., and should a pool of water be near at hand, they will often be found clustered about its edge, merrily drinking and bathing, as, like most birds, they are very fond of water. By the first of May,

they are generally all mated, and they then forsake the maples for the evergreens, preferably the cedars, where they spend much time chattering noisily, as if discussing the hardships of the past winter. Although they still remain in flocks, each male now keeps close watch over his mate, so that the pairs tend to keep more by themselves, especially when feeding. Last spring, when they remained until May 21, I had strong hopes that they would breed here, since so far as I know, the nidification habits of the species are as yet a mystery; but they all suddenly left and none have appeared since.

It seems to be a general rule with our winter migrants, that, after visiting the east in increasing numbers for a few years, they suddenly reach a period of maximum abundance, after which they practically disappear, for some time. Such seems to be the case with the Evening Grosbeak. During the winter of 1916-17, they were very abundant here, and were reported from many places in Ontario and the northern United States. During the past winter, however, they have been entirely absent, although as far as this district is concerned, their favorite food has been plentiful. They may, of course, re-appear next winter, but it is quite probable that they will not be seen here for a few years to come.

The following is a list of the dates of arrival and departure, etc., for the past five years:—

1912-13.—Arrived December 31 and soon became common. During January and February several large flocks were seen, but they gradually diminished in numbers, until only twelve were observed on March 2. These remained until May 5, when they all left.

1913-14.—Arrived on November 16, when four were seen. Gradually increased in numbers, until twenty were observed on January 4th. Remained common until May 1.

1914-15.—Very few were seen this winter. Three arrived on January 12, and eleven were seen on February 3. According to my notes they were absent until April 5, when three appeared. None were seen after this.

1915-16.—This was another off-year. Although sixteen arrived on December 5, the largest flock seen after this was five, but they remained until May 20.

1916-17.—More Evening Grosbeaks visited Arnprior this winter than ever before, perhaps more than in the preceding four years together. On October 29, the earliest date on record, fifteen arrived. They steadily increased in numbers until December 24, when at least sixty were seen. Dur-