



Evening Grosbeak



Photo: © Carl Savignac

Scientific name

Coccothraustes vespertinus

Taxon

Birds

COSEWIC Status

Special Concern

Canadian range

Yukon, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador

Reason for Designation

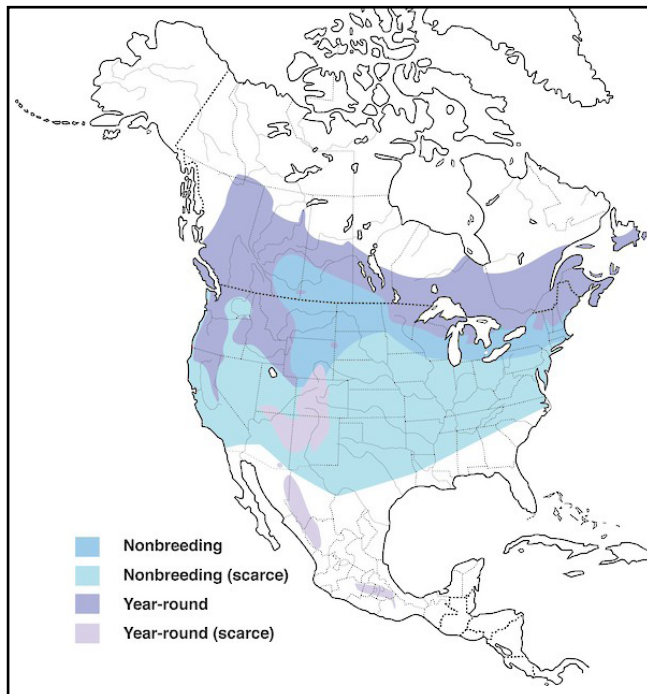
This large finch is widely distributed across Canada's forests, but has exhibited significant long-term declines (77-90%) over most of its range, since 1970. Over the past decades, some data suggest a further decline of nearly 40%, while other data indicate stabilization at a lower level. Threats to the species include reduced availability of mature and old-growth mixed wood and conifer forests, collisions with windows, and mortality associated with feeding on grit and salt along roads in winter.

Wildlife Species Description and Significance

Evening Grosbeak is a stocky, boldly coloured songbird, with a massive greenish-yellow bill. Adult males have a dark brown head with a brilliant yellow supercilium; the brown of the head transitions to yellow upperparts and belly, contrasting with a black tail and black wings, with a distinct patch of all-white secondaries. Adult females and juveniles are generally greyish-brown with some yellow on the nape and flanks and black and white wings and tail. In summer, this species can be a major predator of the Spruce Budworm and helps in the natural control of this insect pest. In winter it is a familiar visitor to bird feeders.

Distribution

Evening Grosbeak breeds in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. In Canada, its distribution includes all Canadian provinces and territories except Nunavut. In the United States, the species breeds primarily in northern New England and some western states. In winter, it is nomadic and can range widely, depending on the quantity of seeds produced in the boreal forest. Historically, this species was restricted to western North America, but expanded eastward in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Distribution of Evening Grosbeak showing nonbreeding, and year-round ranges in North America.

Source: Map provided by Birds of America online (<https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/home>), Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Habitat

Optimal Evening Grosbeak breeding habitat generally includes open, mature mixedwood forests, where fir species and/or White Spruce are dominant, and Spruce Budworm is abundant. Outside the breeding season, the species seems to depend largely on seed crops from various trees such as firs and spruces in the boreal forest, but is also attracted to ornamental trees that produce seeds or fruit, and bird feeders stocked with sunflower seeds.

Biology

Evening Grosbeak is socially monogamous and is not territorial during the breeding period. Pairs typically arrive on their breeding grounds from mid- to late May, and the nesting season can extend until early September. The nest is an open cup made of twigs or rootlets located in the canopy of trees, with conifers preferred over deciduous trees. There is one clutch per year with an average size of 3 to 4 eggs; re-nesting may occur if the initial clutch fails. Incubation typically lasts 12 to 14 days, and fledglings leave the nest at 13 to 14 days old. The age at first breeding is one year.

Population Sizes and Trends

The Canadian Evening Grosbeak population is estimated to be approximately 2,200,000 mature individuals. Trends are difficult to evaluate for nomadic species, but data from the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) show similar long-term declines. The CBC, which samples sites throughout the entire wintering range, indicates a significant overall decline of 3.4% per year from 1970 to 2012, corresponding to a cumulative decline of 76.6%, although from 2002 to 2012 there was a non-significant increase of 3.1% per year. The BBS primarily monitors the southern portion of the Evening Grosbeak's breeding range, and indicates a significant annual decline of 5.2% between 1970 and 2014, for a population decline of 90% over 44 years. BBS data for the most recently available ten-year period (2004 to 2014) show an ongoing significant decrease of 5.0% per year in Canada, for a cumulative decline of 42%. Short-term (2004-2014) BBS trends are also negative in all provinces, but the trend is significant only in Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. Provincial breeding bird atlases, the Étude des populations d'oiseaux du Québec (ÉPOQ), and Project FeederWatch also generally show declining trends. Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac (QC) data suggest that Evening Grosbeak numbers were low from 1998 to 2011, but have increased considerably from 2012 to 2015. The Fort Liard Songbird Monitoring Project in the southern Northwest Territories showed a stable trend for 1998 to 2011. Overall, long-term trends are strongly negative across many sources of data; there is more variability among short-term trends, with some indicating ongoing declines, and others reflecting stability or increasing numbers in certain regions.

Threats and Limiting Factors

Fluctuations of Spruce Budworm populations, which naturally occur every 25-40 years in eastern Canada and every 26 years in western Canada, are likely a key factor in fluctuations of the Evening Grosbeak population since 1970. Known threats to Evening Grosbeak include mortality caused by window strikes while birds are visiting feeders in winter, reduction of mature and old-growth mixedwood forests due to commercial forest management, and mortality due to road collisions when individuals feed on grit and road

salt. Mortality related to ingestion of sodium chloride along roadsides may also be a threat. Over the long term, there may be a contraction of breeding habitat due to climate change.

Protection, Status, and Ranks

In Canada, Evening Grosbeak and its nests and eggs are protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, 1994. NatureServe considers Evening Grosbeak secure in Canada, imperilled in Prince Edward Island, and vulnerable in Yukon, Manitoba, and New Brunswick; in other provinces and territories, the species is considered either secure or probably secure.

Source: COSEWIC. 2016. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xi + 64 pp.

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