

THE GRAY-CROWNED ROSY FINCH IN MANITOBA AND VICINITY

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The Gray-crowned Rosy Finch is a medium-sized fringillid with a range stretching from the islands of the Bering Sea, to as far south as central-eastern California.^{4,9} The breeding range in Canada includes southwestern Alberta, all of British Columbia except the northeastern quarter, and extends to the central Yukon. The easternmost limit of the usual winter range includes southern Alberta and extreme southwestern Saskatchewan. Curiously, for a bird which typically spends its summer at the higher levels of mountain ranges in the Rockies and farther west, the first rosy finch to be discovered, and subsequently described, was a specimen taken near Carlton House, Saskatchewan, in May 1827 (Swainson and Richardson⁴, cited in Bent⁴). Our sighting of this species in extreme southeastern Manitoba in November 1978 prompted a search for other Manitoba records, and ultimately to a summary of all known records of the species east of the normal winter range in the northern Great Plains.

A Gray-crowned Rosy Finch spent the 1978-79 winter at Pinawa, Manitoba, where it was seen on many occasions by several experienced observers from 20 November to 30 March. Since these observations constitute only the ninth record of this species in Manitoba in nearly 90 years (Table 1), and are the only series of sightings throughout a winter, they are described here in some detail.

The Pinawa bird was first seen by Nelda Turner at a feeding station on

20 November 1978. It accompanied a flock of Evening Grosbeaks, which are common visitors to Pinawa feeding stations. Having identified the bird from guides at hand, and realizing that it was unusual, she reported the sighting to the senior author and on his advice obtained a series of photographs.^{9,31} Two days later, R. W. Knapton, W. Neily and K. DeSmet arrived from Winnipeg to verify the record. They obtained further photographs (Fig. 1) and observed the bird closely to determine that it belonged to the subspecies *tephrocotis*.

The arrival of about 20 cm of permanent snow on 12 November, combined with unseasonably cold temperatures, likely prompted the finch to seek out a feeding station. The overnight temperature was near -30°C, some 20 degrees colder than usual, so that a high-density, fat-rich food supply would be welcome. However, although this was the second coldest winter of the century in southern Manitoba, conditions were no more severe than those usually encountered in parts of the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch's winter range. The Pinawa bird was subsequently observed feeding in temperatures as low as -35°C.

About a week after the original sighting the bird moved about 1.5 km to a different part of Pinawa, where it frequented several feeding stations, including Taylor's. It generally fed on small seeds, not taking the sunflower seeds favoured by Evening and Pine



Fig. 1. Gray-crowned Rosy Finch at Pinawa, Manitoba.

R. W. Knapton

Grosbeaks. It was regularly quite aggressive, and would drive away single Evening Grosbeaks which landed on a table when it was feeding. However, it usually took flight when large numbers of Evening Grosbeaks arrived, or else it was relegated to feeding on the ground adjacent to the feeder. Callin and Gross reported aggressive behaviour of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches toward House Sparrows.^{5 14} Although the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch is primarily a ground-feeding species, R. Zach watched the Pinawa bird consume birch tree fruits on 26 November, and Taylor observed it foraging in the top of a mature aspen with four male Evening Grosbeaks on 26 February. Rosy finches have been noted for their seemingly fearless behaviour, readily approaching farms for grain and hay, and bird feeders where small seeds are present.³⁷ Our observations support this description.

In the Pinawa bird, pink colouration was restricted to the edges of the wing

feathers, and a suffusion in the flanks and rump. The pink was no more prominent or extensive when the bird was last closely observed on 30 March, and we conclude that it was a female.

"Normal" Winter Distribution

In winter Gray-crowned Rosy Finches migrate to lower altitudes, and move east and south from the breeding range above the timberline in western North America, where they nest on cliffs.^{4 9 23} The winter range limit shown in Fig. 2 encloses, to the best of our knowledge, all localities at which flocks of 25 or more birds have been recorded. No records of more than six birds appear to have occurred east of this limit, with the exception of 22 at White Bear, Saskatchewan, during the winter of 1975-76.¹⁵

The species occurs commonly in winter at lower elevations in southern Alberta, for example, at Brooks and Ralston.³⁷ It occurs sporadically in ex-

treme southwestern Saskatchewan, (e.g., Eastend, Fort Walsh, Dollard, Ravenscrag, White Bear), sometimes in large numbers: e.g., 40 at Eastend, 9 March 1934³²; 200 at Eastend, 20 December 1940 (C. F. Holmes cited by Bent⁴); up to 100 at Eastend, and 22 at White Bear, winter 1975-76¹⁵; 140 at Fort Walsh, 31 December 1976.^{20 35} Christmas Bird Count data published in "American Birds" show that the species occurs in much of Montana in winter, and there are records as far east as Fort Peck (40, 3 January 1976¹⁵) and Miles City (81, 18 December 1976³⁹). There are at least four records of substantial numbers in North Dakota, all in the extreme west of the state: 20 on 13 December 1966 in Billings County (E. Bry, fide R. E. Stewart⁴⁰); 25 at Bowman, 19 November 1972¹⁸; 200 at Medora, 20 December 1975^{15 33}; 96 at Medora, 16 December 1978.⁴⁰ The regular winter range of this species in South Dakota is shown by Whitney et al. to be restricted to the far west-central portion of the state.⁴⁴ They cite many winter records of large numbers within this range. We show a more easterly range limit in South Dakota on the basis of records of 500 at Badlands National Monument and 65 at Scenic.⁴⁴ The "normal" winter range then apparently swings south and west to include extreme northwestern Nebraska.⁴

Extralimital Winter Occurrence

The circles on the map in Fig. 2 show all the extralimital occurrences of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches of which we are aware, within the area shown, and east of the "Normal winter distribution" in Saskatchewan and the Dakotas as defined above. Data for these records are given in Table 1. Nearly all of these records are of single birds, showing that they refer to wandering individuals, rather than irruptive movements of the kind

associated with many other fringillids which winter in the northern Great Plains. We note however that occurrence just within the range limit, e.g., in southwestern Saskatchewan, appears to be sporadic. A disproportionate number of these records, including four of the nine Manitoba sightings, have occurred in approximately the past decade.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the distribution of records as a function of distance from the breeding range, since the reports are strongly affected by the human demography of the region. Thus the absence of records from northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba may simply reflect the scarcity of observers. However, there is a decrease in frequency with increasing distance eastward, and the Ontario, Iowa and Minnesota records probably represent the limit of wandering which may reasonably be expected to occur. There is one remarkable, well documented record from the state of Maine.¹⁴ Lawrence stated that several other specimens were present in Manitoba at one time, but their origin appears to be unknown.²⁶ N. Criddle indicated the species was rare at Aweme, but apparently no details are available.²⁶ Virtually all extralimital records are for the period late October to early April. There is one surprisingly late record by C. S. Francis of a bird near Nipawin on 3 June 1953.⁵

Notes On Subspecies

Two subspecies of the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, *L. t. tephrocotis* and *L. t. littoralis* (formerly Hepburn's Rosy Finch⁴), are known to occur in the region of interest. They are readily distinguished in the field, *littoralis* having more extensive gray colouration on the head.^{4 9} The *littoralis* breeding range lies to the



Fig. 2. Eastward extralimital records of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches (shown by circles). Stars show reported flocks of 25 or more birds within the "normal" winter distribution. Numbers refer to Table 1.

northwest of that of *tephrocotis*, and it thus might be expected to occur less frequently on the Great Plains. Few of the records in Table 1 are specific to race, but they appear to bear out this expectation. However, *littoralis* has been recorded as far east as Ontario, Manitoba and Minnesota, as well as the extraordinary Maine bird. There is one record by Potter³² of a flock of 12 *littoralis* birds at Ravenscrag, Saskatchewan; at least the majority of records of large flocks in southwest Saskatchewan are referable to *tephrocotis*.

Rosy Finches are evidently highly adaptable in being able to live from above treeline in summer, to lowlands and farmyards in winter, and in crossing wide expanses of boreal forest to reach locations such as Thunder Bay, Ontario. Pinawa is located approximately 30 kilometres east of prairie grasslands and farms, in an area of boreal forest, so that surroundings for the bird reported here were somewhat different from the open areas commonly encountered farther west in the winter. Finally, it is not known whether the recent increase in

TABLE 1: Summary of eastward extralimital winter records of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches.

Location	Date	Remarks	Source
A. Manitoba			
1. Birtle	Jan. 1891	One, in collection of Ernest Thompson Seton	26, 38, 42
2. East Bay, Lake Dauphin	18 Nov. 1922	One, apparently <i>L. t. tephrocotis</i>	26
3. Stonewall	Nov. 1939	One seen	8, 17
4. Basswood	3 Feb. 1942	One ♀?	27
5. Russell	2, 9 Nov. 1959; 22 Mar. 1960	One seen	1
6. Erickson	13-14 Mar. 1968	One, identified by R. J. Walker, verified by J. A. Crosby	16
7. Winnipeg	22 Dec. 1977 - 8 Jan. 1978	One, observed by Mr. and Mrs. W. Deans, identified by H. W. R. Copland as <i>L. t. tephrocotis</i>	8, 17, 25
8. Winnipegosis	10 Feb. to late Mar. 1978	One, observed by R. and G. Coder, identified to subspecies from photograph as <i>L. t. littoralis</i> , by W. J. Walley	43
9. Pinawa	20 Nov. 1978 - 30 Mar. 1979	One female <i>L. t. tephrocotis</i>	This report
B. Saskatchewan			
10. Carlton (House)	May 1827	Type locality for species	4, 19, 41
11. Indian Head	"Prior to 1924"	"repeated observations"	5, 30
12. Swift Current	25 Nov. 1933	Specimen "taken in district"	22
13. Macrorie	26 Feb. 1938	One seen	36
14. Regina	23 Oct. 1940 "early winter" 1948	One seen One specimen	3, 5 3, 5
	19-21 Jan. 1973	One male, photographed, Boggy Creek valley	3
	15 Nov. to 20 Dec. 1975	One, photographed, Wascana Waterfowl Park	3
	Winter 1975-76	One, 40 km north	3
15. Nipawin (Torch River)	early Dec. 1940	One seen, several days	5, 19
	3 June 1953	One seen	5, 19
16. Saskatoon	20 Oct. 1962	One seen	5, 10
17. Fort Qu'Appelle	2 Feb. to 3 Apr. 1963	Two males	5
18. Glentworth	30 Oct. 1963	One <i>littoralis</i> seen	7
19. Valley Centre	10-12 Nov. 1973	Four seen	34
20. Biggar	22 Jan. 1974	One seen	34
21. Togo	Feb. 1974	Two seen, 7 km north	29
22. Spring Valley	17-20 Dec. 1975	One seen	15, 35
23. White Bear	Winter 1975-76	Up to 22	15
24. Kindersley	Dec. 1977	One and two seen	21

C. North Dakota

25. Jamestown	14-18 Dec. 1975	One at a feeder, obs. G. Pospichal	40
26. Bismarck	Jan. 1979	One at a feeder, obs. Dr. Johnson	40

D. South Dakota

27. Volin	late Dec. 1960 to 15 Mar. 1961	One, photographed	44
28. Aberdeen	14 Nov. 1972 to 1 Feb. 1973	One, photographed	44
29. Burke	2 Dec. 1972 to about 1 Mar. 1973	Six	44
30. Lacreek NWR	26 Oct. 1973	One	44
31. Sheep Mountain	22 Nov. 1973	Two	44

E. Minnesota

32. Near Minneapolis	3 Jan. 1889	MMNH Sp. No. 216	13
33. Bagley, Clearwater Co.	late Dec. 1967 to Mar. 1968	Two	13
34. Little Marais, Lake Co.	25 Jan. to 16 Feb. 1972	One, photographed	13
35. Grand Rapids, Itasca Co.	28 Oct. 1972	One ♂	13, 28
36. Hoyt Lakes, St. Louis Co.	11 Mar. 1978	One	6

F. Iowa

37. Sioux City			4
38. Oelwein	Wintered to 18 Mar. 1978		24

G. Ontario

39. Thunder Bay	31 Mar. 1963	One, photographed (<i>littoralis</i> ?)	2
	25 Feb. to 25 Mar. 1973	One, photographed (<i>littoralis</i>)	11
	31 Jan. 1975	One, photographed	12

H. Maine

40. Gorham	15 Dec. 1936 to at least 10 Mar. 1937	One, trapped, banded and photographed (<i>littoralis</i>)	14
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extralimital sightings of this species is due to a larger number of Rosy Finches wandering east, or to a larger number of interested observers. Whichever is the case, indications certainly are that the species occurs occasionally over a wide area, and should be watched for during the winter.

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Gray-crowned Rosy Finch foraging on bail stack, Eastend, Saskatchewan, 29 December 1978.

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