

The grosbeaks took their time venturing from the east side of Womble Mountain in southeastern Saline County where my neighbor Calvin Cummins had first discovered them 15 November 1993. I rushed over to see about 40 of the cardinal-sized birds as they feasted noisily on dogwood berries at the edge of Calvin's yard. By mid-December, the flock increased to about 40 individuals.

After 10 Evening Grosbeaks found our feeders 1 January 1994, our flock steadily grew, but we suspected we were sharing Calvin Cummins' birds. When we had a huge number of birds at our feeders, a phone call to Cummins revealed he had very few. Luckily, a few grosbeaks found other feeders in the neighborhood besides ours.

By late January, as the dawn din of grosbeak roll call indicated, even more were lured to our feeders. The birds were far easier to tally at sunrise when they perched in the tops of the oak and walnut trees surrounding our yard. While Gary filled the feeders, the birds gathered high above the yard, giving their harsh "tsew" call, along with other equally unmelodic vocalizations. I knew there were at least 60 grosbeaks in the area, so when we counted 70, we weren't surprised. But a few days later, 90 arrived, expecting to be fed. The winter high count of 110 Evening Grosbeaks came 3 February, which was, remarkably, not even a yard record.

I was a novice birder on 14 December 1985 when five Evening Grosbeaks wandered into the backyard and onto my life list. By spring, 77, the maximum count for Illinois that year, gathered at the feeders on 25 April 1986. None stayed to be recorded for the Spring Bird Count.

The maximum count in my yard occurred 17 January 1987 when 150 of the noisy birds arrived. During a phone call with my sister-in-law, we learned that between the two of us, there were 200 birds. Thankfully, that was the maximum count for the yard, not the daily average. Even our customary 35 birds can dispatch 50 pounds of sunflower seed faster than we like to buy it.

We recorded 50 Evening Grosbeaks during the 1987-88 season; five birds wintered in 1990-91.

While not rare, Evening Grosbeaks are uncommon and irregular migrants and winter residents in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). Most Evening Grosbeaks leave the state before the Illinois Spring Bird Count in May. While it is possible that some flocks in winter go unreported, a noisy bird as colorful as this one should cause some discussion at the local bird seed store.

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State's Second Great-tailed Grackle Record

While driving by an area approximately 1/2 mile south of Route 154 on 3400E on the Randolph/Perry County line 23 January 1994, we noticed a long, large blackbird perched on a round haybale cattle gate. The habitat was an unreclaimed stripmine used as livestock pastureland.

We parked our car next to the cattle feeder where we instantly recognized the bird as one of the *Quiscalus* grackles based on its large size, odd coloring, and long, heavy, slightly hooked black bill at least as long as the head. The throat was buffy brown and the lightest plumaged area on the bird. The head, neck, breast, flanks, and belly were light brown. Back, tail, vent, legs, and undertail coverts were dark black. We also noted a dark thin malar stripe.

We identified the bird as a female Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) and eliminated Boat-tailed Grackle (*Q. major*) based on the light iris and contrasty facial area. Most important to our identification was the loud, ringing "klack, klack, klack" we heard twice. Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds were also there for direct comparison. Our bird was smaller than these.

Finally, when the bird flew to a rubble pile and later a corn field, we noticed the long, keeled tail. Our observations are on file with IORC.

Even though the species has expanded dramatically in the Great Plains, the Great-tailed Grackle is listed as a very rare vagrant in our state with only one acceptable record, an adult female specimen collected in fall at Jacksonville, 5-7 October 1974 (Bohlen 1989). The species breeds as close as western Missouri and is found in winter in marshes, cultivated fields, and feedlots (Robbins 1992).

This sighting represents Illinois' first winter record for the species.

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