

# Rose-breasted Grosbeak

## *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have undergone a noticeable range expansion in recent years. This trend was apparent during the Atlas Project which produced records from 422 priority blocks (55.2% of the statewide total) in 73 counties. Their center of distribution lies within the Glaciated Plateau and Lake Plain regions with records from 90.7 and 76.8% of the priority blocks respectively. On the Glaciated Plateau, these grosbeaks were absent from only a few blocks in the southern counties. They also became scarce within intensively farmed northwestern counties on the Lake Plain. Their representation declined to 60.5% of the Till Plain priority blocks where Rose-breasteds were widely distributed south to Preble, Shelby, Clark, and Ross counties. They were found in only 25.5% of the Unglaciated Plateau blocks, primarily within counties adjacent to the glacial boundary. Along this plateau, breeding pairs were widespread south through Jefferson, Tuscarawas, Muskingum, Perry, Fairfield, and Ross counties. Except for isolated records in Scioto and Washington counties, they were absent from the remainder of unglaciated Ohio. Breeding grosbeaks are scarcest in the southwestern counties where they were found in only 8.7% of the Illinoian Till Plain blocks but included records south to the Ohio River.

Breeding Bird Survey data indicate Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are most numerous in the Glaciated Plateau region with only negligible numbers elsewhere in the state. In fact, they are most plentiful in the northeastern counties south through Medina, Summit, Portage, and Mahoning. Their current numbers in the central and northwestern counties are similar (Peterjohn 1989a).

Nesting grosbeaks may have been widely distributed within Ohio during the 19th century. They supposedly resided in the Cincinnati area early in the century (Kemsies and Randle 1953), although Langdon (1879) did not report any summer records during the 1870s. Jones (1903) claimed pairs were found south to Columbus. However, their statewide abundance and distribution during this century were never definitively established.

The southern populations disappeared by the mid-1930s when Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 27 counties south through Paulding, Wood, Seneca, Ashland, Holmes, Tuscarawas, Stark, and Columbiana. They were locally common in several northeastern counties, particularly Ashtabula (Hicks 1933a), but were rare to uncommon elsewhere. Their recent range expansion was poorly documented, but probably began during the 1950s and early 1960s when increased numbers were apparent near Cleveland (Newman 1969). Dayton's first summer record was established in 1962 and breeding pairs appeared in central Ohio during the 1960s (Mathena et al. 1984, Peterjohn 1989a). The first Cincinnati area nest was discovered in 1975 (Kleen 1975). However, Rose-breasteds did not become widespread residents in central Ohio and regular nesters in the southwestern counties until the 1980s.

Breeding grosbeaks are frequently found in fairly open second growth deciduous woods. They also occupy wooded edge habitats and narrow wooded corridors with relatively dense understories (Peterjohn 1989a). A few pairs have been noted in abandoned fields becoming dominated by saplings (Williams

1950). They exhibit a preference for mesic woodlands, riparian corridors, and swamp forests, and are less numerous in the dry oak-hickory woods of the western counties.

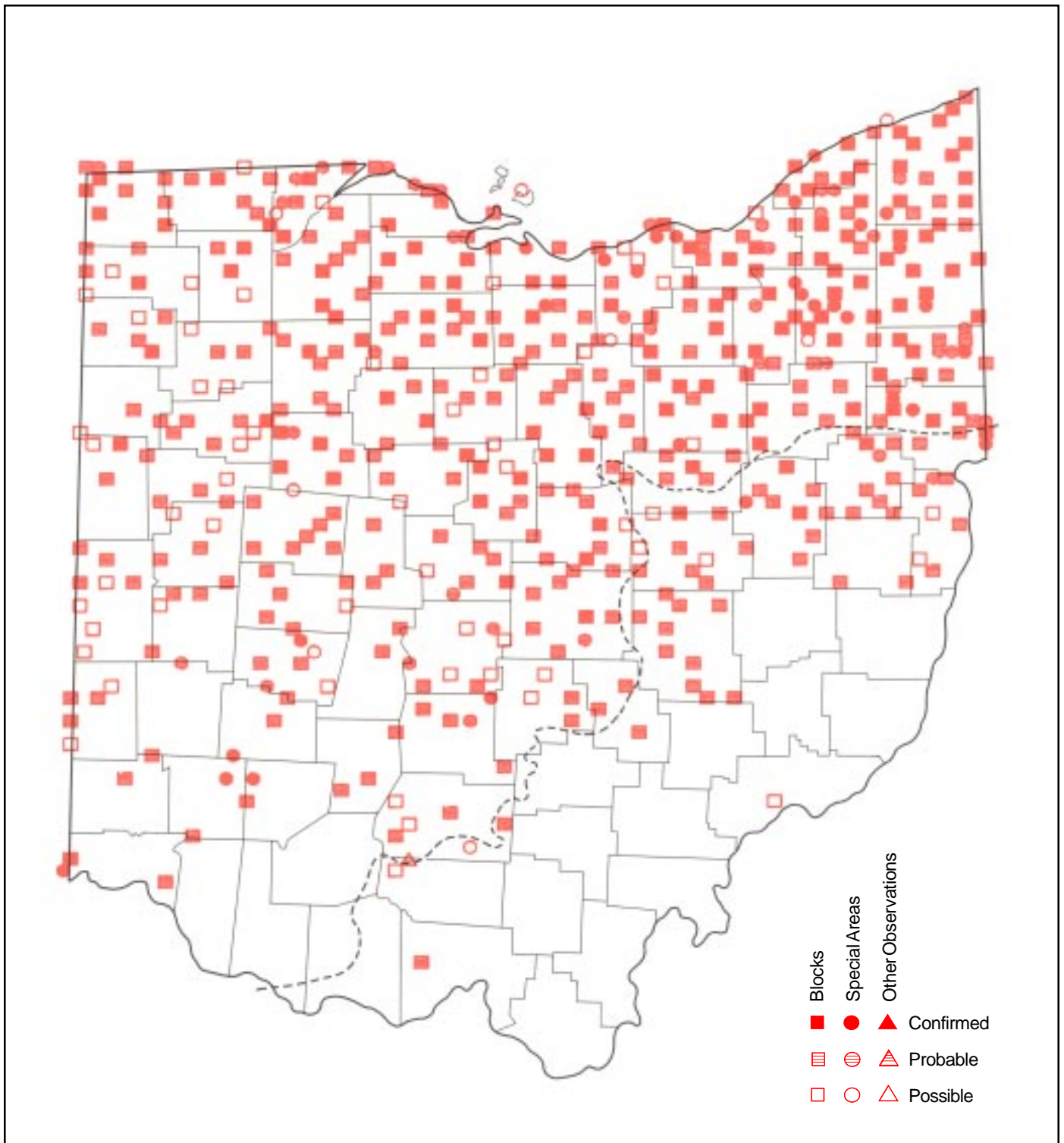
Grosbeak nests are normally placed at heights of 6–12 feet near the tops of saplings and large shrubs. However, some nests have been as high as 55 feet in tall trees (Peck and James 1987). Within Ohio, the earliest nests are built during the first week of May and have eggs by May 11–15. These early nests produced fledglings by June 11 (Campbell 1968). Most nests are constructed during the second half of May and their clutches are noted between May 25 and June 10. Young from these nests



Mike Williams - ODNR Photographer

fledge between June 20 and July 7. Second broods are probably raised by many pairs, although late nesting attempts have never been reported from Ohio. The latest published egg date is June 23 (Williams 1950).

The majority of Atlas Project records pertained to probable breeders, primarily territorial males. Grosbeaks observed in flight provided most reports of possible breeders; only records after June 1 were accepted in order to preclude late spring migrants. Breeding was confirmed in 126 priority blocks. The "30" code provided confirmation in 45 blocks, primarily in the northeastern counties on the Glaciated Plateau (37 blocks). Other confirmed records consisted of adults carrying food for young in 36 blocks, active nests in 22 blocks, sightings of recently fledged young in 18 blocks, and the distraction displays of adults in 5 blocks.



**Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region**

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	73	76.8	17.3	0.8
Till Plain	271	164	60.5	38.9	<0.1
Ill. Till Plain	46	4	8.7	1.0	–
Glaciated Plateau	140	127	90.7	30.1	3.4
Unglaciated Plateau	212	54	25.5	12.8	<0.1

**Summary of Breeding Status**

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>55.2%</b>
Confirmed	126	29.9%
Probable	240	56.9%
Possible	56	13.3%