

# Spring Bird Notes

*By Joyce Wolff*

*Photos by Walt Wolff*



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Walt skillfully, luckily, photographed this lovely bird, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, on our feeder on 10 May. Birds of the Rocky Mountains calls him a "very rare migrant," although my records show we saw one here in 1996 and again in 1997. The amazing coincidence is that he arrived on the 8th of May both those years, making him overdue this time. Summer residents and migrants are quite punctual, a fact that never ceases to amaze and delight me. Spring after spring when I hear or see a first arrival my notes prove that he is right on schedule. Although the habitat is right here, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are birds of the east and north. It is sheer good fortune that he is here for a few days.



**Black-headed Grosbeak**

Black-headed Grosbeaks are common summer residents and arrived several weeks ago. Males are golden orange and black and could be confused with orioles. The disheveled-looking females are pale buff with darker brown markings on their heads and wings. One or two males begin singing right away to establish their territories and will stay around to nest. Others will drift off to find digs elsewhere.



**Evening Grosbeaks**

Another striking occasional visitor that popped in today was an Evening Grosbeak, along with his lady, a pale miniature of himself. Little flocks of them move around the countryside going where the food supply leads them. We can go for months, even seasons, without seeing Evening Grosbeaks. Then suddenly they appear, in any season, crack a few black sunflower seeds in a frenzy, and fly away. Early this spring Mike Shelton (south end) had them for weeks long before ours appeared today at Loma Lobo (north end).

Not only do individual species arrive on schedule in the spring but also unusual species can appear within a few hours of one another. So it was not unlikely that a third uncommon bird made an appearance at our feeder yesterday: a Blue Jay. Now we've had this lesson before. A Blue Jay is a species. We have several resident jays that are blue; none of them are Blue Jays that easterners are familiar with. They are not uncommon on the eastern slope and according to the literature are establishing wider ranges because of tree corridors developing from the east. I have only two sightings now in my records that date back sporadically to 1990 when we bought our property.

Yesterday I heard an Ash-throated Flycatcher, which may nest here possibly in a nest box. Carolyn Santoro saw a Western Tanager last week, which will probably nest nearby in a ponderosa pine. I heard a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher last week on the brushy slope behind our cabin and hope for another nest in a juniper. Pine Siskins are trilling. Mountain Chickadees are dee-dee-deeing. Mourning Doves are cooing. And Wild Turkey males are strutting in their Thanksgiving best. A Poorwill, that usually flits through the late evening sky, sat in the pinon tree immediately outside the window this evening and called for several minutes. It seemed to be his personal announcement to me that he had arrived for the summer. Common Nighthawks and Hermit Thrushes are yet to come.



Several weeks ago on a windy, unpleasant morning as some of us were cleaning up around the guard shack, we were treated to the beautiful melodic song of a Canyon Wren whose song echoes off the rock walls of the railroad cut every spring. This unmistakable song is a series of notes starting high and clear, descending and trailing off.

The Red-shafted Flicker settled in early this year. He stopped drumming on our metal chimney weeks ago. Last year he drummed constantly, early in the morning and well into June, when he began drumming on anything that would resonate. He has the (bad) attitude that if he's awake the rest of the world should be, too. We see he has personalized the entrance hole of the new flicker nest box. Michael Hughes has seen a pair of Canada Geese in Gallinas Canyon where Mallards nest every year.

There are more birds than these on the Ranch but in my haste to get the news out about the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, I've failed to mention them. I tend to take towhees, jays, finches and hummingbirds for granted, and I shouldn't - I apologize.

Our Ranch and surrounds are rich with bird life. I frequently hear the thought expressed that there aren't the number of birds here that folks had "back home." That lack of birds usually refers to Cardinals or "red birds," which indeed do not inhabit the Rocky Mountains.

I'm always disappointed when I find that most people don't hear or see birds. They are oblivious to their presence. They live in a "Silent Spring." Bird watching is an easily acquired skill. It is cheap, aside from a pair of decent binoculars and a field guide, and you can do it anywhere. Exercise your senses. Take time to watch and listen.