

# Black-headed Grosbeak — is that a drunken Robin?

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Imagine you are sitting in your car on the side of the road near a forested stand of mixed trees and shrubs.

You scan the area for the bird you are hearing call. The call got your attention because it sounds like an American Robin but something just seems a bit off. It sounds a bit like a drunken Robin.

Have they been eating too many berries?

Motion catches your eye and you raise your binoculars to look closely. That's no Robin — it's a Black-headed Grosbeak. What a great find.

Black-headed Grosbeak winter in the tropical lowlands of Mexico but spread throughout the western United States to breed.

You won't find them in the shrub-steppe unless you run into a forested area. Aspen



*Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.*



**Black-headed Grosbeak — after wintering in Mexico, they spread throughout the Western U.S. to breed.**

stands and cottonwoods may draw the Grosbeak to the area.

Mostly, though, these Robin sized (seven to eight-inch) birds are looking for berries. They won't hesitate to grab a hard-bodied beetle, bees, spiders or snails.

Believe it or not, the Black-headed Grosbeak is one bird that will actually eat the typically toxic Monarch butterfly. Given the vulnerable status of the western Monarchs, I'm hoping the Grosbeak cut them slack.

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They will also eat the berries of poison oak. Their digestive system must be a very interesting and hardy place.

The stout beak on these birds is well adapted to breaking sunflower seeds so it is very possible to see them come to your backyard feeders. They will eat directly from the feeder or pick up seeds from the ground.

If you live near a forested area with a diverse understory of smaller trees and shrubs, you should expect to see Black-headed Grosbeak.

We've seen them in our yard in Wenatchee and many other places along our foothills and forests. Around Wenatchee, Number Two Canyon and the Squilchuck area are great places to look for them.

Like so many other wild creatures, the Black-headed Grosbeak is susceptible to changes in our climate.

The Audubon Society estimates that a change of +2 degrees Centigrade would result in a loss in the range of these birds. A 3-degree change could result in a 45 percent reduction in their range.

We are fortunate to see them in north central Washington and should take every opportunity to appreciate them and the other birds that live in or visit our area.

Remember to take your camera and binoculars when you head out for a drive.

If you hear a slightly tipsy Robin singing, stop and look carefully. It may be a Black-headed Grosbeak. Good luck.