

Blue Grosbeak (Male)

Passerina caerulea

A large, vibrantly blue bunting with an enormous silver bill and chestnut wingbars, the male Blue Grosbeak sings a rich, warbling song from trees and roadside wires. He and his cinnamon-colored mate often raise two broods of nestlings in a single breeding season. A bird of shrubby habitats, these richly colored birds can be hard to spot unless you hear them singing first. They are widespread but not abundant across the southern U.S., and are expanding their range. .

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

The Blue Grosbeak is a stocky songbird with a very large, triangular bill that seems to cover the entire front of its face, from throat to forehead.

Color Pattern

Adult males are deep, rich blue with a tiny black mask in front of the eyes, chestnut wingbars, and a black-and-silver beak. Females are primarily rich cinnamon-brown. The color is richer on the head, paler on the underparts; their tails are bluish. Both sexes have two wingbars; the upper is chestnut and the lower is grayish to buffy. Immature Blue Grosbeaks tend to a rich, dark chestnut brown, with chestnut wingbars.

Behavior

Blue Grosbeaks are unobtrusive despite their bright colors, although in summer males frequently sing their pleasant, rich, warbling songs. Often they sing while perched at high points in the shrubs and small trees of their generally open or shrubby habitats. Listen for their loud, almost metallic chink call. Also watch for this species' odd habit of twitching its tail sideways.

Habitat

Blue Grosbeaks are characteristic species of old fields beginning to grow back into woodland. They breed in areas covered in a mix of grass, forbs, and shrubs, with usually a few taller trees. In more-arid areas, they often use the shrubby growth along watercourses.

Cool Facts

- The oldest Blue Grosbeak on record was 6 years, 1 month old when it was captured and released by a Maryland bird bander in 2010.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 5.9 - 6.3 inches
- Wingspan - 11 inches
- Weight - 0.9 - 1.1 ounces

