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MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Grosbeak witnesses drastic decline in Michigan

The Evening Grosbeak, the largest finch species of the northern boreal and montane conifer forests, has an intriguing history behind its population numbers and distribution across North America. The species was virtually unknown east of the Mississippi River prior to 1850 before it rapidly expanded its range to the east. Population numbers peaked around 17 million in the early 1980's. Range wide the Evening Grosbeak population has decreased 91 percent since 1967 according to the National Audubon Society.

In Michigan, the trend is similar. Populations are divided between the Upper Peninsula (UP) and the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) due to a change in habitat and breeding habits. In the UP, the grosbeak has a year-round range, breeding in mesic mixed forests and open boreal forest consisting of spruce, balsam, fir, and aspen. According to the Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas (MBBA), the UP population has witnessed a 34 percent decline from MBBA I (1988) and MBBA II (2008). Evening Grosbeaks have a winter range in the NLP and are most commonly found in deciduous forests adjacent to jack pines. The NLP population has exhibited a 70 percent decline in numbers since the MBBA I and II.

The cause of this drastic decline in the Evening Grosbeak population is currently unknown but there are several factors that could play critical roles. Deforestation, especially in the Canadian boreal forest, may have caused a disconnect between the Michigan and Canadian grosbeak populations. Limited prime habitat may be another reason for the decline. Chemical control for the breakout of the spruce budworm, the Evening Grosbeak's favored food source, may have also played a role in the species decline. With fewer spruce budworm the grosbeaks had to find other sources of food and it turned to backyard feeders. Unfortunately, the grosbeak is susceptible to Salmonellosis, a avian disease spread through feeders by contaminated fecal matter left behind in the food. Lastly, climate change may have affected the Evening Grosbeak's distribution and caused the bird to stay farther north.

All of these factors have caused the Evening Grosbeak to be listed on National Audubon's list of "Top 20 Common Birds in Decline" along with being listed as an "immediate conservation concern in Michigan" by the MBBA. However, the species still remains listed as Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) suggesting there is still time to help improve the Evening Grosbeak's future.

The species is heavily dependent on improved forest management methods and encouraging public land managers to have bird-friendly management plans. Providing citizens with information on how to keep a clean and disease free feeder station will also help diminish the spread of avian diseases. Additionally,

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reducing the effects of climate change, living a sustainable lifestyle and staying informed on current legislation will help improve the grosbeak's future.

The current global population of Evening Grosbeaks is around 3.8 million individuals with Michigan being home to roughly 50,000. With proper management plans and informed citizens this colorful grosbeak has a good chance of recovery. If you would like to contribute to Evening Grosbeak conservation, connect with Michigan Audubon at michiganaudubon.org.

For additional information or photos to use with this announcement, contact Michigan Audubon's, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Mallory King at mallory@michiganaudubon.org or 517-641-4277.

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