

# Red Crossbill (RECR)

*Loxia curvirostra percna*

## Description

Red Crossbill (16 cm long) males are a rusty red, sometimes with orange feathers scattered throughout, and females range from green-yellow to brownish. Both males and females have dark brown wings. Juveniles are streaky brown. As they age, coloration intensifies to their adult plumage.

The Red Crossbill has an extensive global distribution ranging from coniferous forests of North America to Eurasia. Ten subspecies, or types, of Red Crossbills exist globally and are distinguishable not by appearance, but rather by their calls. In Canada, the Red Crossbill (Type 8) breeds in Newfoundland and Quebec (limited to Anticosti Island); however, spruce budworm and introduced red squirrels may threaten the species through competition for resources.

This type of finch is easily recognized by the shape of its specialized bill; a downward curved, hook-like bill with the lower and upper mandible crossing over one another. This can be observed in both males and females and allows the birds to forage seeds from the cones of coniferous trees. White-winged Crossbills have the same style of bill, but have conspicuous white wing patches that the Red Crossbill lacks.

## Known and potential breeding habitat

Red Crossbills breed in mature coniferous forests and do not migrate, but are nomadic throughout the year. They can be found wherever there are abundant conifer cone crops and can breed nearly year round if there are enough cones. In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed from 15 December to 14 October.

## Detection Tips

### *Habitat*

Red Crossbills are found in forests of red and white pine, mature black spruce, balsam fir, and white spruce. In Newfoundland they have been most common in central, eastern, and southern parts of the Island.

### *Vocalization*



Photo By: Darroch Whitaker



Forest



COSEWIC Ranking:  
Threatened



NL Designation:  
Endangered



Finches, Euphonias, &  
Allies

Photo By: Michael Benz on Unsplash





Female Red Crossbill.  
Photo By: Alvan Buckley

Red Crossbills have numerous vocalizations; the vocalizations change based on ecotype and are used to distinguish subspecies. “Contact” calls, or flight calls, are family specific. Juveniles will imitate the flight calls of their parents. These calls are described as “cheet-cheet-cheet”. Songs are a series of short, hard, clicking, or buzzy phrases described as “pit-pit, tor-r-ree, tor-r-ree”.

### *Behaviour*

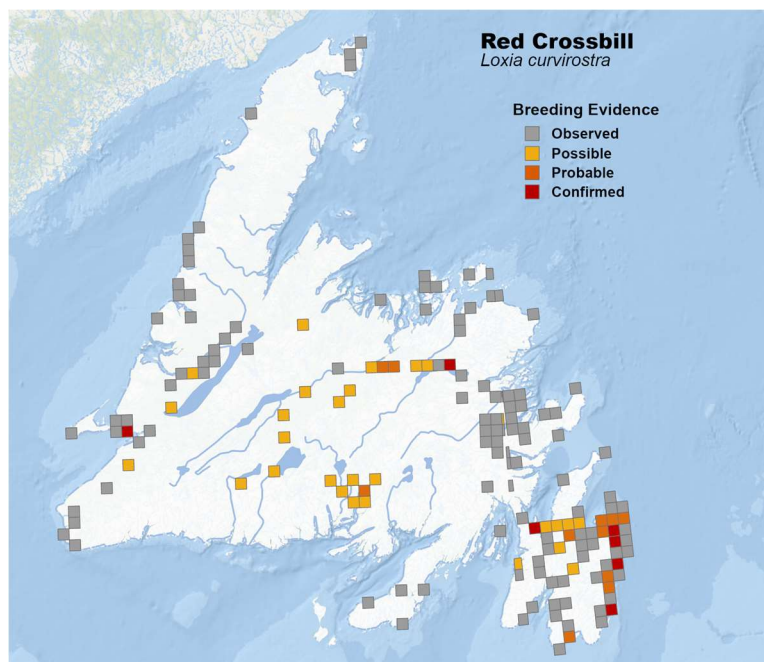
The species is best described as “irruptive” meaning they do not migrate to the same locations each year, but flocks undergo large movements to follow food availability. Birds are often observed in small flocks foraging for conifer cone seeds at the tops of trees.

### *Nesting*

Females build a nest in open forests using various materials including small conifer twigs, grasses, lichens, needles, bark, hair, and feathers. Nest location varies with season; in the winter nests are closer to the trunk, while in summer they are farther out on branches.

### *Breeding Evidence*

Breeding occurs when food is available in sufficient supply, so individuals may breed multiple times per year when there are good cone crops, and not at all in other years. Confirmed breeding evidence is difficult to detect, so evidence usually includes an adult or pair in suitable habitat during breeding season (H and P, respectively), or a male singing in suitable habitat (S). Higher breeding codes could include an adult carrying nesting material (NB), and during the incubation period (12-16 days) the female may be observed in the nest (AE) and the male may be observed feeding her. Fledged young (FY) may also be observed.



Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra percna*) were detected in 164 atlas squares across Newfoundland during the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 7 of these squares.