

Western Flycatcher sp.

Record Number: 92-38

14 Nov 1992

Classification: A-P

Lake Ahquabi S.P., Warren Co., IA

*A.Johnson,*Kent,*Fuller,*B.Blevins

IBL 63:19, 68, AB 47:102

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ann Johnson (14 Nov), 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211 (Oct 1993)

Thomas H. Kent (15 Nov), 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Jim Fuller (15 Nov), 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240

Brian Blevins (15 Nov), 2003 E. 12th St., Davenport, IA

LETTERS

Peter Pyle to Thomas H. Kent, 18 July 1993

Kevin J. Zimmer to Thomas H. Kent, 28 August 1993

PHOTOGRAPHS

Ann Johnson, 14 Nov, P-0346

T. H. Kent, 15 Nov, P-0347

Jim Fuller, 15 Nov, P-0348

Tim Schantz, 15 Nov, P-0389 [IBL 64(1) cover]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 63:19

Records Committee: IBL 63:68, 64:67

Johnson, A. 1994. Western Flycatcher at Lake Ahquabi. IBL 64:6-8.

Photo: American Birds 47:102, 1993, P-0347

VOTE: 5 A-P, 1 A-D, 1 NA

NA, The documents and photos seem highly acceptable if you don't research too deeply. After reading Advanced Birding I think I will vote not acceptable. Because Advanced Birding page 189: Finding an Empid out of range should never be accepted on basis of sightings alone, regardless of how many or how skilled the observers. Tape recordings of the songs would be ideal, but vagrants to not often sing. Photographs taken in field rarely show enough detail for certain identification. Generally, with a nonsinging vagrant Empid, your only choice of confirming the record would be to have the bird mist netted for careful measurement in hand. Page 201 last paragraph: Much more difficult is the separation of Western and Yellow-bellied flycatchers. Call notes provide the only clear cut distinction. The eye rings tend to be more teardrop shaped in Westerns, but this is highly variable. Westerns tend to be slightly longer tailed, and to have slightly more of a peak on the crown. It should be emphasized that all these points are subtle, variable and almost impossible to detect without direct comparison. Sight records of either species out of range would be impossible to prove without excellent tape recording and photos.

A-P, Photo clearly shows greenish back, almond-shaped eye ring, peaked head, light orange lower mandible, and longish tail. The yellow coloration on throat and breast is not evident. While the probability is higher for Cordilleran Flycatcher, I am reluctant to accept a second-hand description of the call which the observer did not record in his documentation.

A-P, The combination of characteristics: yellow throat, teardropped shaped eyering, bill shape and color, tail flicking, crested crown, and short primary extension all fit Western Flycatcher. The characters above are described consistently throughout the documentations and can be seen in the photographs. I think the eyering eliminates the other empidonax flycatchers. The range favors Cordilleran Flycatcher and the song description tell me little, so I will have to call this a Western Flycatcher sp.

A-D, I cannot see yellow in throat or breast/belly areas, to me these areas look ashy white like the eyering. I cannot see any brownish wash on the breast either. The wings and tail look dark brown with whitish-buff wingbars. The eyering is pointed behind the eye and there is a peak at the rear of the crown but I cannot say if these feathers are raised on the head or whether the wind has fluffed them or the bird has fluffed them due to the cold or some other effect. I do not think the photos

conclusively support Western Flycatcher. The written description is much more convincing than the photos. I also was not impressed with the description of the birds call since no one saw the bird produce a call itself. The calls given could have come from some other bird for all we know.

A-P, Good details and descriptions provided for Western Flycatcher. Key marks indicate Western Flycatcher and not Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Good photos help show key marks.

REVOTE: 5 A-P, 1 A-D, 1 NA

NA, I vote NA as per my first comments but would like to see comments from others.

A-P, I have some sympathy wiht the A-D voter that the yellow was not visible from the photo, and may have been swayed in this regard by the written description rather than the photographic evidence. Regardless, I felt that the combination of the eyering shape and presence of the slight crest carried this one.

A-P, The questions boils down to whether empids can be identified without hearing them. Peterson, for years, fostered the idea that they couldn't be separated. Kaufman and others have gone to great lengths to point out morphologic and behavioral differences. Kaufman then reverts back to Peterson's notion as a precautionary note. The degree of yellow in the throat and upper breast in the photo is partly a matter of exposure. Fuller's photos show more yellow. I am impressed with the distribution of yellow (throat and upper breast vs. lower belly and wing bars on Yellow-bellied Flycatcher). The tear drop eye ring must be on the most prominent side for Western and exceedingly unusual for Yellow-bellied. The crest and tail flicking are also strongly suggestive of Western.

A-D, I do not think the photo shows enough detail to completely rule out a worn plumaged Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. I feel this record should stay at A-D since the photos do not conclusively support the documentation for Western Flycatcher sp. Maybe comments from a guest expert on the Western Flycatcher complex could help us on this record. Additional discussion at the spring meeting may also sway my opinion.

A-P, The articles of the December 1990 sighting of Pacific-slope Flycatcher in Pennsylvania were interesting. Tim Schantz has nice slides of this bird which I have seen, and it's unfortunate that he didn't sent one in.

REVOTE (at meeting of 15 May 1993): no change in vote. It was decided to seek outside opinion.

REVOTE (by mail with outside consultations): 7 A-P

A-P, The outside reviewers comments were extremely helpful in explaining some of the ID points that were borderline to me from the views in the photos. I was told there were better photos taken than the ones circulated. Did the outside reviewers see only the photos that were circulated or did they also see the other "better" photos? [both/thk]

Chicago to frequent garbage dumps on the city's s. side. The bird, believed to be in 2nd-year plumage, was discovered at O'Brien Lock and Dam, Cook, Nov. 27 (†LA); it remained until Dec. 12 and was seen and photographed (JM) by scores of birders. This appears to be the first confirmed Glaucous-winged Gull e. of the Mississippi R. A Great Black-backed Gull wandered w. to Riverlands Environmental Area, MO, Nov. 15-19 (JV *et al.*), where this species is casual. Black-legged Kittiwakes were widely dispersed across the Region, with three in Illinois, three in Indiana, two in Ohio, and one in Missouri. The earliest sighting was at Ogden Dunes, IN, on the remarkably early date of Oct. 4 (JW). Notable among the Illinois birds was a well-documented adult at Wilmette Nov. 25 (†RHu). The Missouri kittiwake, a juvenile, was found near in Boone (s.e. of Columbia) Nov. 24 (†PMc, ph. DH); this species, which is casual away from the Mississippi R., provided a first county record. An ad. Sabine's Gull was at L. Spfld. Sept. 27-Oct. 1 (†DBo, ph. DOe).

TERNS TO WOODPECKERS

Caspian and Com. terns moved through in normal numbers, with respective peak counts of 85 at Coralville Res., IA, Sept. 3 (TKi), and 500 along the Indiana lakefront Sept. 18 (KB). Late Forster's Terns lingered at L. Spfld. until Nov. 11 (DBo) and at Cal-loway, KY, until Nov. 19 (CP). Perhaps Rosche's comment, "Wow! Where have they gone?" most aptly describes the dwindling Black Tern numbers across the Region. Though small numbers were reported in 5 states, the highest count was a paltry 25. One of the season's most pleasant surprises was the appearance of the Region's first Dovekie at La Salle Nuclear Plant, IL, Nov. 26 (†CW, †JMc). The alcid was observed at close range and was studied for more than an hour as it swam and dove in the plant's cooling lake. Dovekie records exist for Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The latter consists of 2 specimens, both taken in late November.

Both cuckoos appeared in normal numbers. The rarely reported pale form of Great Horned Owl was at Algona, IA, Nov. 29 (MK). A modest incursion of Snowy Owls developed in the n. states, with eight in Ohio, six in Illinois, six in Indiana, and three in Iowa. Burrowing Owls were reported from 2 Iowa locations. The first was found dead in the grill of a local car in Pocahontas, Sept. 10 (SN, *fide* JDi), and the 2nd was observed in Story, Sept. 11 (JK, *fide* JDi). Per usual, Long-eared Owls were reported sparingly, with five in Illinois and two in Iowa. Short-eared Owls appeared in every state; the maximum count was eight in Victoria, IL, Nov. 14 (MBa). Single N. Saw-whet Owls were found at five locations: 3 in Iowa, one in Illinois, and one in Ohio.

Good Com. Nighthawk flights occurred in every state; among the peak counts were 2500 at Columbus, OH, Sept. 3 (KA), >1200 in Highland Park, IL, Sept. 7 (PF), and 1050



This bird, apparently of the Western Flycatcher complex (Cordilleran or Pacific-slope), was a notable stray at Lake Ahquabi, Iowa, November 15, 1992. Photograph/T. H. Kent.

in Homes, OH, Sept. 4 (ES). The only large Chimney Swift tally was made in Urbana, IL, Sept. 8, where 1200+ were observed (RCh). Sadly, a traditional site was destroyed when the chimney at Fairfield High School, IA, was blocked; in previous years, hundreds of swifts congregated at the school, but this year only seven swifts were found (DP). Iowa's 3rd Lewis' Woodpecker was discovered Oct. 14 in rural Cherokee, n. of Washta. The bird remained until Oct. 18 (†MBw, ph. THK, m.ob.).

FLYCATCHERS TO WRENS

Olive-sided Flycatchers, E. Wood-Pewees, and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were reported in typical numbers. Most unexpected was the appearance of a "Western" Flycatcher at L. Ahquabi S.P. IA, Nov. 14-15. This individual could not be identified as to species, (†AJ and BBr), †ph. JF). If the bird can be identified, it will constitute a first record for the Region. Lingering Acadian Flycatchers were reported at several locations; the latest satisfactorily documented record was Sept. 26 at Fox I., IN (Haw). A late E. Phoebe was identified at Headlands Beach S.P., OH, Nov. 15 (CH). Remarkably, two Vermilion Flycatchers made a striking appearance within the Region this fall, both females. The first was at Spfld. Sept. 18 (†DBo, ph. DOe), furnishing Illinois' 5th record (and first ever for fall). The 2nd bird, at Rathbun Res., Oct. 25 (†JSi, ph. †THK, †m.ob.), provided the 3rd Iowa record. Extralimital W. Kingbirds were found at Rice L., IL, Sept. 6 (ASt), at Penfield, IL, Sept. 7 (RCh), and at Geneva S.P., OH, Sept. 15 (†JP).

Sizable Purple Martin flocks included >5000 in Fulton, KY, Aug. 23 (BM *et al.*), 2000 in Chicago July 22 (KH), and 1100 at

Ottawa N.W.R., OH, Sept. 6 (EP). Tree Swallow counts reached 20,000 at 2 Illinois locations: L. Chat., Sept. 25 (KR) and Rice L. Oct. 3 (RCh, LA). Illinois also provided maximum counts: 2000 N. Rough-winged Swallows at L. Chat., Aug. 29 (RP), 2000 Bank Swallows at L. Chat., Sept. 12 (RCh), and 100 Cliff Swallows Sangamon, Sept. 3 (DBo). A lingering Bank Swallow in Henderson, KY, Oct. 10 (MSt) provided a new late date for the state. A Barn Swallow at Wilmington Res., OH, Nov. 21 (LG) was also quite late. Unusual for the fall migration was the passage of 410 Blue Jays in just a half-hour at Union Slough N.W.R., Sept. 20 (MK). Fledgling Blue Jays, being fed by adults in Jefferson, KY, Sept. 1 (DS), provided an unusually late nesting record. The 140 Fish Crows observed at the Union County conservation area Sept. 25 (KM) represent one of the highest counts ever for the state. Red-breasted Nuthatches were plentiful only in Iowa—counts were disturbingly low elsewhere. Winter Wrens peaked at Ottawa N.W.R., Oct. 4, when 25 were counted. Both Sedge and Marsh Wrens enjoyed normal migrations.

KINGLETS TO WARBLERS

A bumper flight of Golden-crowned Kinglets resulted in high counts across the Region. A rather late nesting of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers was established in Grayson, KY, Aug. 11 (KCl), when adults were observed feeding 3 young. A Townsend's Solitaire turned up in s.w. Iowa, where this species is rare. The bird was discovered at Waubonsie S.P. Nov. 11 (BR, PL) and was still present Nov. 13 (THK, JF). The peak Swainson's Thrush count was 138 in Evanston, IL, Sept. 15 (EW). Hermit Thrushes also had an excellent flight in n.e. Ohio (LR). A very late Wood Thrush was discovered in Urbana, IL, Oct. 25 (EC). The largest Am. Pipit count consisted of 200 in Parke, IN, Nov. 6 (AB). Seventy, observed in Medina, OH, Nov. 14 (JMe), represents a fine count for that location. A record number of Sprague's Pipits were recorded in w. Missouri. Eight were sited at Rosecranz Airport Oct. 2 (MR), and 14 were there Oct. 18 (DE, TBk). These impressive numbers were pale compared with the 37 found at Taberville Prairie Oct. 23 (DE). An unusually large assemblage of 2000 Cedar Waxwings visited Summit L., IN, Oct. 31 (JB, KG). Typical Shrike numbers were reported across the Region, with 11 Northerns and 10 Loggerheads.

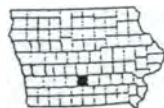
Vireos were reported in typical numbers. An extremely late imm. White-eyed Vireo was discovered in Columbus, OH, Dec. 15 (†BW), and a tardy Philadelphia lingered in Chicago's Jackson Park until Oct. 24 (DoA, KCa). Late Red-eyed Vireos appeared at Highlands Beach S.P., OH, Nov. 1 (LR, RHn) and at Spfld., Nov. 19 (DBo).

As is frequently the case, assessment of the warbler flight depended strongly on the location of the observer. In the Chicago area, the warbler migration produced good numbers

WESTERN FLYCATCHER AT LAKE AHQUABI

ANN JOHNSON

On Saturday, 14 November 1992, Beth Brown and I were leading a field trip for the Iowa Audubon Council at Lake Ahquabi State Park in Warren County. A low pressure system had moved through the area two days earlier, bringing with it chilly temperatures. The overnight low had been 24° F and 0.4



inches of snow had fallen between 4:00 and 9:00 a.m. The wind was from the northwest at 13 miles per hour. By 9:00 a.m. the snow had stopped falling and cloud cover had decreased to 20 percent. Our morning bird list was rather short, with the usual resident woodland species, when I noticed a small bird dart from a low branch down to the grasses and return. The bird in front of us was none other than an *Empidonax* flycatcher which we would later identify as a Western Flycatcher.

The bird was olive-green on the back and as it turned we saw yellow underparts including the throat, breast, and belly. Our initial reaction was that we had a very late Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Further observation, however, began raising a few doubts. The brownish-olive head was large with a pronounced peaked appearance. The bill was wide with a black upper mandible and a dull orange lower mandible. The yellow eye ring was almond-shaped, thicker at the front and pointed at the rear, at times appearing broken at the top. The back and tail were olive-green, and the wings were gray-brown with buffy wing bars. The yellow underparts were nearly uniform although the yellow was a bit brighter on the throat and through the center of the breast and belly. The primaries were relatively short, extending to the base of the tail from above or about even with the undertail coverts below. This short primary projection accentuated the length of the tail. The bird habitually flicked its tail and was actively pursuing insects in the sunny patches of grass along the wooded edge.

I was fairly certain that we had a vagrant *Empidonax*, most likely a member of the Western complex. This complex was created in 1989 by the split of Western Flycatcher into Cordilleran Flycatcher of the interior and Pacific-slope Flycatcher of the West Coast. We listened to tapes of *Empidonax* flycatchers to see if a call we had heard earlier matched anything on the tapes, but our results were inconclusive. After alerting the Birdline and a few other birders, we returned to the park and again observed and photographed the bird in the same general location. Several birders from central Iowa made an unsuccessful attempt to relocate the bird that afternoon.

The next morning a number of birders from across the state were searching for the bird with no success. The overnight low had been a chilly 26° F, and the wind had shifted to the southeast, bringing with it heavily overcast skies and a trace of new snow. I recalled that the previous day's activity seemed to be directly tied to grasses bathed in sunshine, a commodity in short supply this Sunday morning. About 9:30 a.m. Jim Fuller and I heard a dry call note reminiscent of a flycatcher but could not find the bird. Finally around 11:30 a.m. the sun appeared and so did the bird. Once again it darted to the grasses, seemingly catching insects that were stirring in the warming sunlight. A number of individuals were able to see and photograph the flycatcher from distances as close as 15 feet. The general consensus was that it was indeed a Western Flycatcher species. Cal Knight played a tape, and the bird became very agitated but did not call.

On Monday the wind was blowing from the south and temperatures reached a high of 61° F. Seventy-five percent of the daylight hours were sunny. The snow melted

and David Younblut, who kept vigilant watch on the area was unable to relocate the flycatcher. The loss of snow cover had perhaps increased the area of available food supply or the drop in barometric pressure may have triggered the bird's movement.

Knowledge of *Empidonax* flycatchers, and concurrent new field identification techniques, have increased a great deal in the last decade. My first attempt at visual identification of *Empidonax* flycatchers involved application of characteristics outlined by Jim Lane (Lane and Holt 1987) to birds of the Rocky Mountains. More comprehensive and detailed information is available in the excellent references used in analyzing this record (Zimmer 1985, Whitney and Kaufman 1985a, 1985b, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, Kaufman 1990).

Although many fall flycatchers have a yellow wash on the underparts, only three flycatcher species combine an olive back with a yellow throat and short primary extension: Yellow-bellied, Cordilleran, and Pacific-slope. The latter two are identifiable only by voice and comprise what is known as the Western complex. The characteristics, documented by numerous photographs, that most strongly favor Western Flycatcher were the brown rather than black wings, extreme almond-shaped eye ring, the peaked appearance to the head, and the upward flicking of the tail.

Peter Pyle has banded numerous *Empidonax* flycatchers throughout the United States and Mexico. In analyzing the Iowa record (pers. comm. to T. H. Kent, 1993), he offers the following:

"The best features to distinguish these two [Western and Yellow-bellied] in the field are (in descending order of reliability):

- 1). Wing color. To my knowledge there is absolutely no overlap in this feature. Even worn Yellow-bellieds in summer/fall show the dark wings and contrasting lemon edgings typical of the species. By comparison all Westerns of both forms have brownish wings with dingier, less-contrasting yellow edging. The Iowa bird's wings are typical of Western and outside the range of variation in Yellow-bellied in my experience.
- 2). Upperpart coloration. This also seems pretty reliable (with little or no overlap) but is harder to judge on a single bird. The Iowa bird's upperparts appear strongly tinged with olive, again typical of Western and, in my opinion, outside the range of even a worn Yellow-bellied.
- 3). Eye ring. Although variable in both species I again believe that there is little overlap when eye ring extent, color, and shape are combined. The Iowa bird's eye ring is extensively "almond-shaped", in fact toward the extreme in Western and thus quite distinct from typical Yellow-bellied. The coloration, a "plain" lemon rather than bright lemon, is also typical of Western and not of Yellow-bellied.
- 4). Other visual features. The breast of the Iowa bird is tinged mustard yellow. I believe that (like the underwing color) this is more typical of Western, Yellow-bellied being lemon here with a dusky suffusion giving it a "greenish" appearance. The crown is certainly peaked on the Iowa bird, as suggestive of Western according to Kenn Kaufman. I have not critically evaluated variation in this although our Yellow-bellieds on the Farallons did seem to have subtly rounder (and smaller?) heads. The tail of the Iowa bird seems consistent in length with Western although this is again hard to judge in the field on a single bird. The behavior of the Iowa bird seems typical of what we see in Westerns (Westerns often flick their tail without flicking wings.)
- 5). Call note.

To summarize, all of the more important visual characters match Western Flycatcher with several falling outside the range of Yellow-bellied in my experience. When all of these features are combined...there is little doubt that your bird was a Western Flycatcher."

We were certain that we had a "Western" flycatcher, but which one? On 16 December 1990 a Pacific-slope Flycatcher was identified during a Christmas Bird Count in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. This was the first record of *Empidonax difficilis* east of Kansas (Maloney and Morrin 1991, Haas 1991). On the subsequent Christmas Bird Count, 15 December 1991, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher was again identified (Witmer 1992). On both of those occasions the bird uttered a one-syllable call note which was recorded. The only unusual notes that any of us heard at Lake Ahquabi could not be directly attributable to the bird in question since it did not call when it was in sight. A calling bird might not have been particularly helpful in absolute identification, however, as even experts take a conservative approach in identifying by call. Kevin Zimmer (pers. comm. to T. H. Kent, 1993) states, "In my experience, migrant Westerns (of either form) are either silent or utter a one-syllabled SEET note (differences exist between forms in this single-note call, but it would take a very practiced ear to confidently base the ID on call-note alone)." Pyle refers to a yet unpublished article on clinal variations in the song and call notes of the two species in Washington and British Columbia (pers. comm. to T. H. Kent, 1993), a factor lending even more credence to the difficulty in separation of the two species.

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FIELD REPORTS--FALL 1993

THOMAS H. KENT AND JAMES L. FULLER

WEATHER AND HABITAT CONDITIONS

June through August precipitation statewide totaled 26.81 inches or 14.22 inches more than normal. Beginning in September, precipitation was below normal which led to falling water levels in most habitats throughout the state.

August continued a nine-month string of supernormal precipitation with statewide averages of 8.22 inches (nearly twice normal). The temperatures were very cool during the first week but warmth and humidity prevailed from the 9th through the 29th. A change in the jet stream brought back cooler (and drier!) conditions at month's end.

September finally broke the string of flooding rains with the first monthly average below normal since October 1992. However, the month's average temperature was the coolest September since records began in 1873!

October was relatively uneventful but temperatures were again below normal as was precipitation. A hard freeze occurred on the 10th.

November was fairly quiet with only a winter storm on the 24-25th when northwestern Iowa was covered with three to ten inches of snow. The rest of the state received only light snow but there was some freezing rain and sleet. Both total precipitation and temperatures were below normal.



Tom Kent



Jim Fuller

Table 1. Statewide Temperature and Precipitation with Deviation from Normal.

	Temperature, F		Precipitation inches	
	Mean	(Deviation)	Mean	(Deviation)
August	72.7	(+1.0)	8.22	(+4.19)
September	57.9	(-5.5)	3.75	(-0.08)
October	49.7	(-2.4)	1.33	(-1.20)
November	34.6	(-2.8)	1.08	(-0.70)

GENERAL TRENDS

Grebes were reported in good numbers this fall, including six Westerns and one Red-necked. In spite of all of the water present, the numbers of Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets was not impressive, but Cattle Egrets staged a major invasion with nesting for only the third time. Although there was extensive water habitat in August, the number of shorebirds appeared to be below average, but more than during the spring period this year. The number of waterfowl was not impressive, but they may have passed through over time without large peaks. More scoters than usual were reported. Raptor movements are being monitored in Marshall and Pottawattamie counties, which hopefully will give us a better picture of their fall migration in Iowa. Snowy Owls and, especially, Red-breasted Nuthatches staged major invasions.

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

August 28, 1993

Dear Tom:

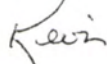
Greetings! Sorry to be so long in getting back to you on this. I've been saddled with a bad hand (basketball injury resulting in surgery to repair a torn ligament/chip fracture), and spent a few weeks in Ecuador on tour. On top of this, a dear friend of mine (Ted Parker) was killed in a plane crash in Ecuador while I was there.

At any rate, I have examined the photos and details, and find the record relatively straight-forward. It is my belief that Yellow-bellied Flycatcher can be ruled out by the photos. The peaked (almost crested) look to the head is perfect for Western Flycatcher and quite different from the more round-headed look of Yellow-bellied (the fact that the head shape is consistent from photo-to-photo argues against the peaked look being the result of behavioral influences). The eyering is classic Western, and although this character is subject to some variation in Yellow-bellied, I have never seen one that approached this marked tear-drop look. The folded wings do not appear to show the contrast that I would expect from Yellow-bellied (not black enough, and without strong white edging), and the upperparts do not have the same green tone that I associate with that species. The late date of this record is also indirectly suggestive of an out-of-range species, which in mid-November may be at least as likely as an eastern *Empidonax*.

While I have no problem in narrowing the ID to "Western-type", I would not attempt to go further in distinguishing between Pacific and Cordilleran types. On present knowledge it is not possible to visually separate these forms in the field. The descriptions of calls given in the enclosed details seem to be speculatively assigned to the flycatcher, and do not even agree that closely with one another ("dry chur-up" vs. "whee-seet"). While Pacific-Slope and Cordilleran flycatchers are separable by voice, the differences are not of the magnitude that would make such separation easy for observers lacking comparative experience. Furthermore, the 2-syllabled "calls" described, actually sound more like the song, which is typically not heard from migrant birds (especially in late fall). In my experience, migrant Westerns (of either form) are either silent or utter a one-syllabled SEET note (differences exist between forms in this single-note call, but it would take a very practiced ear to confidently base the ID on call-note alone). Also, it has been proven time and again that vagrant birds are often not of the geographically-closest form. Therefore, I would have no problem in calling this bird a Western-type (as opposed to Yellow-bellied or another species), but would not narrow the identification further as regards Cordilleran vs. Pacific-Slope.

I hope this is helpful in your deliberations. By the way, I have a pair of Pacific-Slope Flycatchers nesting in my back-yard every year, while Cordillerans are the type that I dealt with routinely in New Mexico (including removing many from mist-nets). I still can't distinguish silent birds from one another in the lowlands of Arizona in May (where either form might occur), so I suspect that many records of vagrant Western-types will have to be left at that level of identification.

Best wishes,



Kevin J. Zimmer
1665 Garcia
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Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246

18 July 1993

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the opportunity to review your record (92-28) of the Western Flycatcher. I have no hesitations in considering the bird a Western Flycatcher and not a Yellow-bellied or Acadian flycatcher, and I also believe that the photographs alone are "indicative" of Western Flycatcher. I never believe that anything is "100%", but in my opinion the chances of your bird not being a Western (as based on the photos alone) are so slim as to warrant acceptance by any Bird Records Committee.

My experience with Western Flycatcher is extensive, although 99% of it is with the "Pacific-slope" form rather than the "Cordilleran" form. They breed where I live (in fact there is one sitting outside my window as I type) and I see and band 20-100 on the Farallones each year. Many years ago I banded numerous Yellow-bellied and Acadian flycatchers in Maryland. I have seen three Yellow-bellied Flycatchers on the Farallones (including the one that Tim Schantz photographed) and in each case the identification was rather quick and straight-forward. I have studied many of all three species in Mexico, including Westerns and Yellow-bellieds in November at the time your bird showed up, and (in preparation for the passerine guide) have examined at least 100 specimens of each species, collected at all times of year.

I include some material published in Western Birds on separating Western from Yellow-bellied Flycatchers (the two candidates; I believe for the same reasons already stated and those mentioned to distinguish Western from Yellow-bellied that the bird was not an Acadian). The best features to distinguish these two in the field are (in descending order of reliability):

- 1) Wing color. To my knowledge there is absolutely no overlap in this feature. Even worn Yellow-bellieds in summer/fall show the dark wings and contrasting lemon edgings typical of the species (as seen in the Schantz photos). By comparison all Westerns of both forms have brownish wings with dingier, less-contrasting yellow edging. The Iowa bird's wings are typical of Western and outside the range of variation in Yellow-bellied in my experience.
- 2) Upperpart coloration. This also seems pretty reliable (with little or no overlap) but is harder to judge on a single bird. The Iowa bird's upperparts appear strongly tinged with olive, again typical of Western and, in my opinion, outside the range of even a worn Yellow-bellied.
- 3) Eye ring. Although variable in both species I again believe that there is little overlap when eye ring extent, color, and shape are combined. The Iowa bird's eye-ring is extensively "almond-shaped", in fact toward the extreme in Western and thus quite distinct from typical Yellow-bellied. The

coloration, a "plain" lemon rather than bright lemon, is also typical of Western and not typical of Yellow-bellied.

- 4) Other visual features. The breast of the Iowa bird is tinged mustard yellow. I believe that (like the underwing color) this is more typical of Western, Yellow-bellied being lemon here with a dusky suffusion giving it a "greenish" appearance. The crown is certainly peaked on the Iowa bird, as suggestive of Western according to Kenn Kaufman. I have not critically evaluated variation in this although our Yellow-bellieds on the Farallones did seem to have subtly rounder (and smaller?) heads. The tail of the Iowa bird seems consistent in length with Western although this is again hard to judge in the field on a single bird. The behavior of the Iowa bird seems typical of what we see in Westerns (Western's often flick their tail without flicking wings).
- 5) Call note. The only thing that seems equivocal to me is the described call note "chur-up" (Johnson) which could be interpreted as sounding quite like the "cheeyip" of Yellow-bellied and certainly unlike the "Pseet" of "Pacific-slope" Flycatcher. It is possible that "Cordilleran" Flycatchers can give a call that would be described "chur-up" although more accurately "whee-seet" (Petersen) from what I understand. Since the bird was most certainly a Western Flycatcher it seems that the "chur-up" may have come from elsewhere, as the observer seems to hint at.

To summarize, all of the more important visual characters match Western Flycatcher with several falling outside the range of Yellow-bellied in my experience. When all of these features are combined (see discussion on Carpentaria [California] Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Western Birds piece) there is little doubt that your bird was a Western Flycatcher. I had not previously read Kenn Kaufman's remarks on this but can only assume that the words in Advaned Birding were derived from his and Brett Whitney's mid-eighties articles in Birding which may have predated our understanding of the separation of these two species.

Concerning the two forms of Western Flycatcher, the eye ring on your bird is extensive for a "Pacific-slope" flycatcher and it seems subtly different from coastal California birds in other regards (that don't apply to it's separation from Yellow-bellied) so perhaps it is a "Cordilleran" Flycatcher. I have seen a draft of an article by R.J. Cannings (submitted to Auk) which documents consistent clinal variation in the song and call notes of the two forms in Washington and British Columbia. I have never liked this split (we have given up on distinguishing these on the Farallones) and, barring some sort of politics, the two will hopefully be relumped. Given this I would certainly refrain from trying to identify your bird (or the Pennsylvania birds) to form at this point.

Hope this helps.

Peter Pyle
Peter Pyle

GREATER PEWEE *Contopus pertinax* (21). One at the San Diego Zoo, San Diego, SD, 20 Feb–30 Mar 1988 (GMcC; 92-1988) returned to the same eucalyptus grove the following winter, 6 Dec 1988–1 Mar 1989 (GMcC, MAP; 5-1989).

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER *Empidonax flaviventris* (4). A first-year bird was caught, banded, and carefully measured on SE Farallon I., SF, 3–5 Sep 1986 (PPT; 56-1987). One was seen and photographed in Carpinteria, SBA, 16–17 Oct 1987 (PEL; LRBa, CDB, CB, JAJ, JEL, RM, CM, JSR, LSt, ASm; 261-1987).

Both of these records were accepted by the Committee on the second round. Minor concerns about the Farallon bird during the first round included the fact that the wing formula (Phillips et. al. 1966) suggested that the bird was a male whereas the wing and bill lengths were small, suggesting a female, that the difference between the wing and tail lengths of 11 mm was 1 mm shy of a published range (12–20 mm; Pyle et. al. 1987), and that the bird may have been a Cordilleran Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis*), which at the time had not yet been split from the Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*; A.O.U. 1989) and was not as well known by Committee members. During second-round comments it was pointed out that the published measurements were based on specimens and might differ slightly from those obtained on live birds, and that Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers are similar if not identical to each other in the plumage characteristics useful in separating them from the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Plumage features characteristic of the Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis* in the broad sense) include olive or brownish tones to the upperparts, a prominently almond-shaped eye ring that is weak or broken above the eye, mustard-colored underwing linings, duller yellow underparts without the appearance of an olive breast band, and, especially in the immature, brownish wings with buffy feather edges and wing bars. The Farallon and Carpinteria birds, like fall Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, had greener upperparts, rounder eye rings that were full above the eye, lemon-yellow underwing linings, generally brighter yellow underparts with diffuse olive breast bands, and black wings contrasting markedly with bright lemon feather edges and wing bars.

On the basis of these characteristics, Committee members were satisfied that the Carpinteria bird was not a Western Flycatcher, but the question arose whether or not a fall first-year Acadian Flycatcher (*E. virescens*) had been adequately eliminated. Outside reviewer Steven W. Cardiff provided a lengthy analysis based on examination of the specimen collection at LSU, cautioning the Committee that none of the noted characteristics on its own eliminated the Acadian Flycatcher. Most Committee members agreed with this analysis but felt that the combination of all characters ruled out Acadian to their satisfaction, as did outside reviewers Kenn Kaufman, Greg W. Lasley, Bret Whitney, and Alan Wormington. With such difficult identifications it is always best to synthesize all criteria simultaneously. The Committee especially thanks the outside reviewers for their input on this record.

The Farallon bird was the third and earliest for the island and for California (see DeSante et al. 1985 for details on the previous two); the Carpinteria bird was the first for mainland and southern California.

DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER *Myiarchus tuberculifer* (15). One wintered in Mission Viejo, ORA, 21 Nov 1987–3 April 1988 (JLD, CM, GMcC, MAP, DRWt; 375-1987). One along the Alamo R. near the S end of the Salton Sea, IMP, 22–30 Dec 1987 (JLD, CM, GMcC, MAP; 44-1988) was the first record for Imperial County. One was near Aptos, SCZ, 21 Jan–10 Mar 1988 (DLS; MJL, DR; 61-1988). One was in Balboa Park, San Diego, SD, 16 Feb–7 Apr 1988 (GMcC; 91-1988).

These four records continue to support the winter pattern of occurrence of this species in California. All 15 accepted individuals have been found between November and March.

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER *Myiarchus crinitus* (24). Individuals were observed on SE Farallon I., SF, 13 Oct 1970 (DDeS; 17-1989), 18 Sep 1971 (DDeS; 18-1989), and 27 Sep 1974 (DDeS; 19-1989). One was in Arcata, HUM, 13 Oct 1978 (SWH; 214-1987). One was on Pt. Loma, SD, 25 Sep 1987 (GMcC; 288-1987). One was at Pismo SB, SLO, 6–7 Oct 1987 (JLD, PEL, CM, DR, KJZt; 253-1987). One was at the Carmel R. mouth, MTY, 9 Oct 1988 (MCM; 218-1988).

The bird at Pismo SB, a photograph of which appeared in AB (42:137), was only the 5th of 24 accepted individuals in California to have been observed at the same locale for more than one day.

THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD *Tyrannus crassirostris* (7). The bird at Peters Canyon, near Lemon Heights, ORA, returned for its fifth and sixth winters, 4 Nov 1987–5 Mar 1988 (MAP; 89-1988) and 29 Nov 1988–5 Mar 1989 (GMcC; 74-1989). It has previously been accepted by the Committee as having occurred each winter since 1982–1983 (Morlan 1985, Bevier 1990).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER *Tyrannus forficatus* (49). A molting adult was at Ramer L., Imperial Valley, IMP, 29 Aug 1987 (GMcC; 280-1987). Adult males were at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley NM, INY, 24 Oct 1987 (PEL; JLD, CM, GMcC; 295-1987), at Moss Landing Wildlife Area, MTY, 21–22 Jul 1988 (BN; CST; 157-1988), and near Arroyo Grande, SLO, 17–26 Aug 1988 (VH; JLDt, MAP; 158-1988).

It is interesting that all four of these individuals were adults, the July and August birds being worn and the October bird being fresh. This species typically molts on its winter grounds, suggesting that the worn birds were southbound migrants whereas the October bird may have molted locally or was an early winter wanderer.

DUSKY WARBLER *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (3). A first-year individual was captured, banded, and carefully measured on SE Farallon I., SF, 14 Oct 1987 (Figure 5; DBE, PHt; 6-1988). Remarkably, this is the third record of this Siberian vagrant in the state and second for SE Farallon I. See Madge (1987) and Round (1988) for recent information on the identification of this species.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe* (4). One was well seen and photographed between Orland and Kirkwood, TEH, 13–15 Oct 1988 (SFB, JLDt, EH, CM, GMcC, JM, BDP, MAP, DRt; 197-1988). Another was photographed on SE Farallon I., SF, 6–10 Nov 1988 (Figure 6; SAT, PH; 64-1989).

These are the first records for California since 1977 and the second and third fall records; a photograph of the Tehama County bird appears in AB (43:164). It was not possible to determine the age or sex of either bird, except that relatively pale plumage indicated that they were not adult males (Svensson 1984). The Committee also felt it best not to speculate on the race of either bird. The nominate race breeding across Eurasia and in Alaska would be expected, but the only infallible way to distinguish immatures and females in basic plumage from those of the Greenland race (*O. o. leucorhoa*) is by measurements (Cramp and Simmons 1988). A reassessment of the 11 June 1971 specimen from SE Farallon I. (Manuwal and Lewis 1972) based on measurements published by Cramp and Simmons (1988) indicates that this bird was of the nominate race (J. Morlan in litt.).

VEERY *Catharus fuscescens* (7). One was observed at the lighthouse on Pt. Reyes NS, MRN, 15 Oct 1988 (DDeS; 292-1988).

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH *Catharus minimus* (7). A first-year individual of the nominate race was banded and measured on SE Farallon I., SF, 17–18 Oct 1987 (JC; PHt; 7-1988).

GRAY CATBIRD *Dumetella carolinensis* (41). One was at Snow Creek Village, near Cabazon, RIV, 23 Sep 1987 (TJG; 51-1988). One was at Scottys Castle, Death

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WESTERN BIRDS



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OCCURRENCE AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER ON SOUTHEAST FARALLON ISLAND, CALIFORNIA

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The occurrence in western North America, particularly in California, of numerous individuals of most migratory species of eastern North American passerines has been abundantly documented (McCaskie et al. 1979, Roberson 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Because of its fortuitous location, size, topography and vegetation, and because of the continuous year-round presence of personnel from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), Southeast Farallon Island, 42 km west of San Francisco, California, has produced an inordinately large number of records of eastern passerines (DeSante and Ainley 1980, DeSante 1983). Eastern flycatchers of the genus *Empidonax*, however, with the exception of the Least Flycatcher (*E. minimus*), are represented there and elsewhere in western North America by very few documented records. Here we report two occurrences of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*E. flaviventris*) on Southeast Farallon Island, the first of which constitutes the first record in California (Roberson 1980). In addition, we present some new information bearing on the identification of this species.

On 16 September 1976, at about 1530, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was captured by LeValley in a Heligoland trap surrounding a prostrate introduced Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*). The bird was immediately suspected of being *E. flaviventris* by virtue of its very bright plumage relative to that of three Western Flycatchers (*E. difficilis*), two of which were captured and banded, present that day. With the bird in hand, the following description was taken:

Top of head, back, rump and upper tail coverts green, tinged with yellow. Eye ring pale yellow. Chin yellowish-gray. Center of throat bright yellow, sides of

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throat grayish-green. Chest grayish-green, abdomen and vent bright yellow. Wings dark blackish-brown with yellow (not buffy-orange) wing bars. Underside of wing at bend of wrist sulfur-yellow (not buff). Tail dark blackish-brown. Bill blackish above, flesh-colored below. Mouth lining orange. Legs blackish. Sixth primary slightly cut out on outer web.

Measurements: wing (chord measured with standard wing rule), 62 mm; primary 10, 55 mm; primary 9, 62 mm; primary 8, 62 mm; primary 7, 62 mm; primary 6, 58.5 mm; primary 5, 54 mm; primary 4, 52 mm; primary 3, 51 mm. Tail (measured with calipers from the insertion of the central rectrices to the tip of the longest rectrix on the folded tail), 48.8 mm.

The individual was in juvenal plumage and had an incompletely pneumatized skull (class 1 on a scale of 0 to 3, with 3 being completely pneumatized). It showed no molt, had no fat, and weighed 9.9 gm. It was banded with USF&WS band 1420-39697, photographed and released. It was not seen again. The written report on this individual was given No. 13-1977 by the California Bird Records Committee (C.B.R.C.) of the Western Field Ornithologists.

On 27 September 1983, at approximately 1350, an *Empidonax* flycatcher was found by Ray Aker in a mist net located on the leeward side of the U.S. Coast Guard house near two fallen Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). While removing the bird from the net, the rectrices were accidentally plucked. Eight rectrices were later recovered. Henderson recognized the bird as a possible Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and took the following description:

Head, back, rump and upper tail coverts *Empidonax* green. Crown slightly darker than back as a result of dark centers on crown feathers. Face rather uniformly colored, the green of auricular area not distinct from postauricular, malar or superciliary areas. Throat generally pale yellow, whitish on chin. A grayish-green wash across upper breast. Remainder of underparts yellow, brightest on lower throat and upper abdomen and palest on lower abdomen and flanks. Undertail coverts whitish washed with yellow. Eye ring pale yellow, thin and fairly uniform in width, only slightly pointed behind eye. Anterior wing bar pale yellow slightly washed with buff; posterior wing bar whitish with a yellowish wash, strongest at tips. Secondaries and tertials crisply margined on outer edges and tips with yellowish-white, the margins on tertials broad and boldly contrasted to the remainder of wing which was dark brownish-black. Underside of bend of wing at the wrist yellowish. Tail dark blackish-brown. Bill blackish above, pale fleshy-orange below with a smoky tinge toward sides and tip. Mouth lining orangish-yellow. Legs blackish. Sixth primary slightly cut out.

Although the records on the original data sheet state that the bird had a fully pneumatized skull (skull class 3), the plumage and shape of rectrix tips (Johnson 1963, 1974) indicate that it was a juvenal. The bird showed no molt, had a trace of fat, and weighed 8.9 gm. It was banded with USF&WS band 1480-03392, photographed by Keith Hansen, and released. It was seen once again later that day. On the following day, 28 September, the bird was netted on four different occasions. Late in the day the bird was found in the Heligoland trap in weakened condition; at approximately 1600 it was found dead. The individual was prepared as a study skin by Larry Spear and deposited in the collections of the California Academy of Sciences (CAS), San Francisco (71430). The bird proved to be a female.

be reviewed by the C.B.R.C.). We can conclude, therefore, that the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has probably been overlooked on the California mainland.

The Least Flycatcher has occurred much more commonly than the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, both on the Farallones [23 fall and 4 spring, 1968-1975 (DeSante and Ainley 1980)] and in California as a whole [53 fall and 11 spring through 1979 (Roberson 1980)]. The Least Flycatcher, however, breeds fairly commonly throughout British Columbia west of the Rockies and appears to be recently expanding its breeding range southwestward to include Washington, eastern Oregon and even northern California where it apparently bred in 1984 (Campbell and LeValley 1984). Its abundance, therefore, should be compared with that of such parulids as Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*: 220 fall and 20 spring on the Farallones 1968-1975; 1333 fall and 72 spring in California through 1979), Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*: 57 fall and 43 spring Farallones; 684 fall and 211 spring California), and Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*: 34 fall and 37 spring Farallones; 218 fall and 107 spring California) that also breed west of the Rockies in British Columbia (DeSante and Ainley 1980, Roberson 1980). Clearly, the Least Flycatcher is less abundant both on the Farallones and in California as a whole than these parulids.

Although the field identification of vagrant Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in western North America is extremely difficult at best and should not be generally encouraged, some observations prompted by the Farallon occurrences seem appropriate. Both Farallon individuals were immediately recognized as *E. flaviiventris*, once in the hand, by their overall bright green upperparts and distinctly yellow eye rings, wing bars, and underside of the bend of the wing, as compared to the duller olive-green or brownish-olive upperparts, whiter, less yellow eye rings and distinctly buffy wing bars and bend of the underwing of fall juvenal *E. difficilis*. Another striking characteristic, displayed by both Farallon birds and by virtually all fall juvenal *E. flaviiventris* in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and the California Academy of Sciences, is the extensive bright yellowish-white edgings to the secondaries and tertials that contrast boldly with the blackish remiges and wing coverts. These edgings are buffy or dirty whitish and more restricted in *E. difficilis* and contrast less with the paler and browner remiges and wing coverts of the Western Flycatcher. Roberson (1980), in discussing the identification of *Empidonax* flycatchers, stated that the eye ring of *E. flaviiventris* is round rather than strongly teardrop-shaped or almond-shaped behind the eye as in *E. difficilis*. In both examples of *E. flaviiventris* from the Farallones, the eye ring was slightly pointed behind the eye but not really teardrop-shaped. In addition, the eye rings of both Farallon Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were distinctly narrower than in typical *E. difficilis*, which probably have the widest and most teardrop-shaped eye rings of all North American species of *Empidonax*. These characteristics are subtle and subjective and have yet to be properly tested in the field. Nonetheless, a fall *Empidonax* in western North America that shows bright green upperparts, bright yellow underparts, a rather narrow yellow eye ring, only slightly, if at all, pointed behind the eye, distinctly yellowish wing bars, and extensive bright yellowish-white secondary and tertial edgings that contrast sharply with blackish remiges and wing

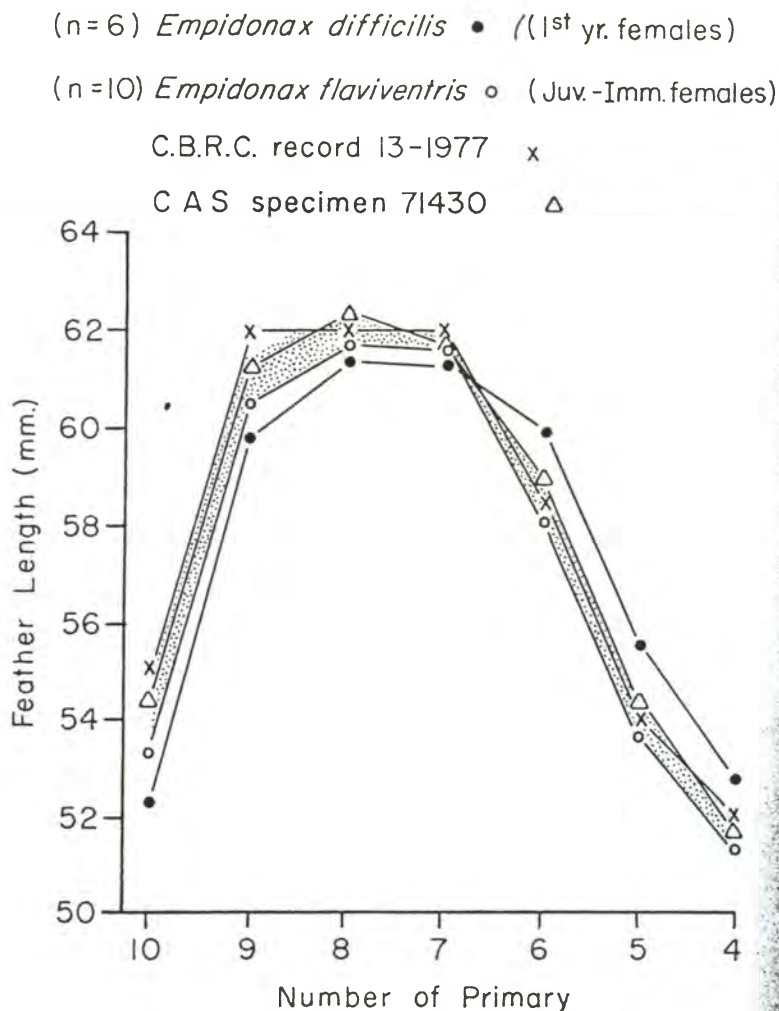


Figure 1. Quantitative appraisal of wing shape in young female *Empidonax difficilis* and *E. flaviventris*, based on the lengths of the outer seven primaries. Technique of measurement is described in Johnson (1963:90-91). Measurements are of fully grown primaries representing the juvenal generation of feathers. Values obtained in the field for C.B.R.C. record 13-1977, and in the museum for specimen CAS 71430, are compared with means of samples of the Western and Yellow-bellied flycatchers. The stippling serves to outline the general shape of the wing to be expected in young female *E. flaviventris*.

DISCUSSION

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher breeds in boreal coniferous forest across much of Canada, west to northern British Columbia (east of the Rocky Mountains), and south to northern North Dakota and the Appalachians of northeastern Pennsylvania. It winters primarily in tropical lowland forests in eastern and southern Middle America and migrates regularly through the eastern United States, west to the central Great Plains and central Texas, and casually west to eastern New Mexico and western Texas (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). The only verified western extralimital records, other than those presented here, are of single individuals collected at Tucson, Arizona, on 22 September 1956 (Phillips et al. 1964) and at Coal

- Empidonax difficilis* • (1st yr. females) Mean ✦
Empidonax flaviventris ○ (Juv.-Imm.females) Mean ✧
 C.B.R.C. record 13-1977 x
 C A S specimen 71430 △

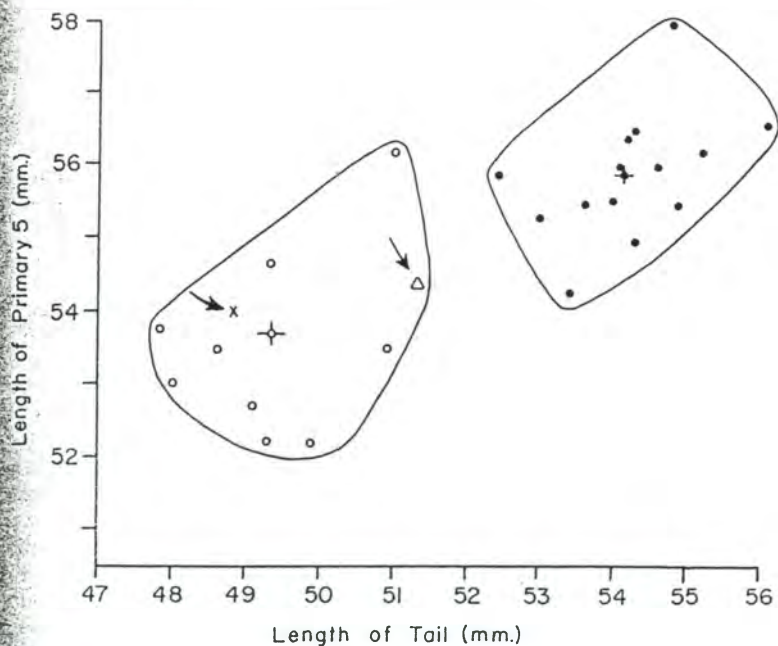


Figure 2. Scatterplot of values of length of primary 5 versus length of tail in samples of young female *Empidonax difficilis* and *E. flaviventris*. See text for method of determination of tail length of specimen CAS 71430.

Creek near the Yukon River in east-central Alaska on 28 July 1966 (White and Haugh 1969).

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher probably occurs more regularly in western North America than these very few records suggest. Its breeding and wintering ranges and migration routes are very similar to those of a number of eastern species of wood warblers (*Parulinae*) that occur regularly as vagrants in fall and, to a lesser extent, in spring in coastal California. The breeding and wintering ranges of the Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) perhaps most closely approximate those of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. This warbler, however, through 1979, was represented by approximately 110 fall and 18 spring occurrences in California (Roberson 1980), including 6 each in fall and spring on Southeast Farallon Island during the 8-year period 1968-1975 (DeSante and Ainley 1980). The Cape May (*Dendroica tigrina*), Bay-breasted (*D. castanea*), Mourning (*Oporornis philadelphia*) and Canada (*Wilsonia canadensis*) warblers also have breeding ranges similar to that of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, although they tend to winter somewhat farther south and/or east. During the eight-year period of 1968-1975, these four species of warblers were represented by, respectively, 8, 10, 5 and 10 fall records and 13, 13, 0 and 3 spring occurrences on Southeast Farallon Island (DeSante and Ainley 1980). Clearly, the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has been recorded much less regularly than these species of warblers.

Part of the reason for the apparent scarcity of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (and, presumably, some other eastern species of *Empidonax* flycatchers) in western North America, must certainly be the extreme difficulty of distinguishing individuals from the regularly occurring species of *Empidonax*, especially the very common and very similar Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*). It is also likely, however, that *E. flaviventris* is in fact an extremely rare vagrant to California. Fully 224 of the 326 individual fall Western Flycatchers that were recorded on the Farallones during 1968-1975 were scrutinized in the hand and banded. None showed characters suggestive of *E. flaviventris*. Probably, the species has not been overlooked on the Farallones in recent years.

What then accounts for the scarcity of vagrant Yellow-bellied Flycatchers relative to species of wood warblers with similar ranges? Although the answer is unknown, it is worth mentioning that nine-primaried passerines (emberizids, including parulids) have been shown to be proportionally more common as vagrants on the Farallones than ten-primaried passerines (tyranids, mimids, thrushes and vireonids) with similar breeding and wintering ranges (DeSante and Ainley 1980). Among non-parulids, perhaps the Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) has breeding and wintering ranges and migration routes most similar to those of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Through 1979, this vireo was represented by only 39 fall and 5 spring occurrences in California (Roberson 1980). During the eight-year period 1968-1975, it was recorded on the Farallones only once in fall and once in spring. The Philadelphia Vireo, therefore, seems to occur in California with only about 1/4-1/2 of the abundance of the Black-throated Green Warbler. Yet its abundance on the Farallones is not much different from that of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher which has not yet been definitely recorded on the California mainland (a recent sight record from Point Reyes, Marin County, has yet

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER

to be reviewed by the C.B.R.C.). We can conclude, therefore, that the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has probably been overlooked on the California mainland.

The Least Flycatcher has occurred much more commonly than the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, both on the Farallones [23 fall and 4 spring, 1968-1975 (DeSante and Ainley 1980)] and in California as a whole [53 fall and 11 spring through 1979 (Roberson 1980)]. The Least Flycatcher, however, breeds fairly commonly throughout British Columbia west of the Rockies and appears to be recently expanding its breeding range southwestward to include Washington, eastern Oregon and even northern California where it apparently bred in 1984 (Campbell and LeValley 1984). Its abundance, therefore, should be compared with that of such parulids as Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*: 220 fall and 20 spring on the Farallones 1968-1975: 1333 fall and 72 spring in California through 1979), Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*: 57 fall and 43 spring Farallones: 684 fall and 211 spring California), and Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*: 34 fall and 37 spring Farallones: 218 fall and 107 spring California) that also breed west of the Rockies in British Columbia (DeSante and Ainley 1980, Roberson 1980). Clearly, the Least Flycatcher is less abundant both on the Farallones and in California as a whole than these parulids.

Although the field identification of vagrant Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in western North America is extremely difficult at best and should not be generally encouraged, some observations prompted by the Farallon occurrences seem appropriate. Both Farallon individuals were immediately recognized as *E. flaviiventris*, once in the hand, by their overall bright green upperparts and distinctly yellow eye rings, wing bars, and underside of the bend of the wing, as compared to the duller olive-green or brownish-olive upperparts, whiter, less yellow eye rings and distinctly buffy wing bars and bend of the underwing of fall juvenal *E. difficilis*. Another striking characteristic, displayed by both Farallon birds and by virtually all fall juvenal *E. flaviiventris* in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and the California Academy of Sciences, is the extensive bright yellowish-white edgings to the secondaries and tertials that contrast boldly with the blackish remiges and wing coverts. These edgings are buffy or dirty whitish and more restricted in *E. difficilis* and contrast less with the paler and browner remiges and wing coverts of the Western Flycatcher. Roberson (1980), in discussing the identification of *Empidonax* flycatchers, stated that the eye ring of *E. flaviiventris* is round rather than strongly teardrop-shaped or almond-shaped behind the eye as in *E. difficilis*. In both examples of *E. flaviiventris* from the Farallones, the eye ring was slightly pointed behind the eye but not really teardrop-shaped. In addition, the eye rings of both Farallon Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were distinctly narrower than in typical *E. difficilis*, which probably have the widest and most teardrop-shaped eye rings of all North American species of *Empidonax*. These characteristics are subtle and subjective and have yet to be properly tested in the field. Nonetheless, a fall *Empidonax* in western North America that shows bright green upperparts, bright yellow underparts, a rather narrow yellow eye ring, only slightly, if at all, pointed behind the eye, distinctly yellowish wing bars, and extensive bright yellowish-white secondary and tertial edgings that contrast sharply with blackish remiges and wing

coverts would certainly deserve scrutiny and, if possible, capture and preservation for detailed study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We sincerely thank the members of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory for financial support and the Farallon Patrol of the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Oceanic Society for logistic support. We also thank Laurence C. Binford for his helpful comments on the manuscript. Gene M. Christman drafted the final versions of the figures. This is PRBO Contribution 176.

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Accepted 24 October 1985

REPRODUCTION OF MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS IN SOUTHCENTRAL MONTANA

JON E. SWENSON, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 1001
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Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) occupy an extensive breeding range in western North America (Bent 1949). They breed in a greater variety of habitats, including the Upper Sonoran, Transition, Canadian and Hudsonian life zones, than other members of the genus (Power 1966, Herlugson 1978, Pinkowski 1979a). Although Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) savannas are often used by breeding Mountain Bluebirds (Pinkowski 1979a), there are apparently no published reports of the reproductive biology of the species in Ponderosa Pine-dominated habitats. Here I report results of a 3-year study of Mountain Bluebird reproductive biology in a Ponderosa Pine savanna in southcentral Montana.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The study area is about 19 km north-northeast of Shepherd, Yellowstone County, in southcentral Montana, on unglaciated sedimentary plains with rolling topography formed primarily by erosion. Altitude is about 1200 m and annual precipitation averages 330 mm.

Ponderosa Pine savanna dominated the study area. Common shrubs were Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) and Skunkbush Sumac (*Rhus trilobata*). Common grasses included Bluebunch Wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), Prairie Junegrass (*Koeleria cristata*) and blue grass (*Poa* sp.). Broom Snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*) and Small Soapweed (*Yucca glauca*) were common forbs. This habitat was similar to the *Pinus ponderosa*/*Artemisia tridentata* habitat described by Jorgensen (1979).

I studied the reproduction of Mountain Bluebirds during the summers of 1967, 1968 and 1969. Prior to the 1967 nesting season, 16 bluebird nest boxes were placed on the study area; these boxes were repaired as required. The nest boxes had inner dimensions of 12.7 x 12.7 x 20.3 cm, with an entrance hole diameter of 4.1 cm located 13.3 cm above the bottom of the box. Boxes were placed 1.3 to 1.6 m above the ground on living Ponderosa Pines (14) or fenceposts (2) along a triangularly shaped route about 2.25 km long. One natural nest, in a hollow stump, was included in this study.

The nests were checked every few days between late March and late July-early August. A nesting attempt was defined as a nest receiving at least one egg. Clutch size referred to completed clutches with incubation underway. The date of clutch completion was the day the last egg was laid in the clutch. If not observed directly, this date was calculated by assuming a 13-day incubation, with incubation beginning on the day the last egg was laid (Power 1966). Nest success was defined as the proportion of nesting attempts producing at least one fledged young. Bias in calculating nest success or nest density inherent in studies involving nest searches, as discussed by Miller and

92-38

November 19, 1992

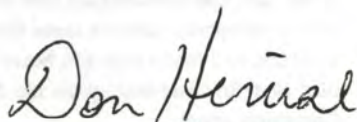
Jim,

The enclosed articles were copied from "Pennsylvania Birds". There are two articles referring to the first sighting in December 1990 from volume 4 number 4, published in March 1991 and one covering the second sighting in December 1991 from volume 5 number 4, published in March 1992.

"Pennsylvania Birds" is published by Frank and Barb Haas at 2469 Hammertown Road, Narvon, PA 17555-9726. Barb is also the secretary of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee and she may have other documentation of these sightings that was not printed. Frank as you will note from the articles is the one who recorded the calls and photographed both birds. The address above is their home address and their phone number is (215) 445-9609. I'm am sure that they would be glad to offer any help, if you have any more questions about the sightings.

Good birding,

Don



Birding the Mundane and Finding the Rare...

First Record of a Pacific Slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) East of the Mississippi

by Joe Meloney and Harold Morrin

The area.

It was December 1976 when Scott Schreiber and Harold first spent several relatively discouraging days beating the brush in an area assigned to us for the first Southern Lancaster County Christmas Bird Count (SoLanCo). Our forlorn conclusion was that we were sent to an area because it was there... not because birds were known to be there. Probably no birding had been done there before. Within the rest of the count circle are local birding hot spots: Muddy Run, Octoraro Lake, Susquehannock State Park and a long stretch of the Susquehanna River. Our section, however, is mostly farmland plowed by the thrifty and hard-working farmers who leave very little brush, even at road's edge. Water is nearly non-existent; a few narrow streams and a few farm ponds, mostly near buildings and devoid of waterfowl. There are deciduous woodlots, with comparatively few conifers, but with brushy undergrowth. Here exist the best possibilities for birds. One area is a woodlot surrounded by open farmland and a small airport, just near the Tanglewood Manor development. We always cover this area starting at dawn, usually for three hours. It was here that excitement was generated in the 1990 count.

Through the years, we were expected to find Lapland Longspur in the Horned Lark flocks. We almost always did (but not in 1990!). It was often the only bird noted exclusively by our group. But, little by little, surprises occurred: a N. Oriole and a Long-eared Owl in a brushy roadside area, an Orange-crowned Warbler in the same area where we later found the flycatcher in 1990, a Bald Eagle flying overhead. Each year the area list grew and now has produced eighty species.

The discovery.

On 16 December 1990 I [Joe] was, for the eleventh time, helping with the SoLanCo count, always in the same area, north of where Routes 222 and 272 converge at Wakefield to Scotland Road. Leading the group along the edge of a woodlot, down a hill, and towards a south-facing slope, I stopped to survey an area of underbrush and scattered trees. I noticed a bird silhouette off to my left, approximately twenty feet from the ground. It was sitting erect displaying a slight peak on the head and nervously twitching its wings and tail.

"Harold! Get here, quick," I blurted. "It's a phoebe-like bird."

Just then, the bird dropped a few branches into better light.

"Not with wingbars like that," then the bird turned to face us, "or with a belly as yellow as that," Harold added.

Slightly embarrassed, I said, "You're right. It's one of the *Empidonax* flycatchers." With my voice trembling and my mind racing, I said, "Harold, we are going to need notes on this bird." Harold agreed.

Enlisting the help of our companions, Joyce Nettke and Bill Ott, we wrote down field marks: eye ring, olive-yellow back, prominent wingbars, an even yellow wash from bill to tail. "The lower wingbars seem brighter," mentioned Joyce. Bill drew a picture of a blunt, slightly notched tail for reference. Harold questioned, "Did anyone notice the lower mandible color?" No, so we relocated the bird and found it was a lighter yellow color. More notes.

"Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is what comes to mind," mused Harold.

"Did you hear that?" I said. "I think it's calling." Within thirty seconds a soft, but clear, *Sssip!* was heard several times. More notes. "Excellent."

We knew that all eastern *Empidonax* except Yellow-bellied Flycatcher could be ruled out, but that a western species was

certainly not out of the question. And we did know that no western *Empidonax* had ever been seen in Lancaster County.

The confirmation.

Joyce and Bill were a big help all day. Their observations added a great deal to the flycatcher field mark routine.

At the post-count get-together at Jo and Ed Pedersons' home, our report generated excitement. The next morning, after a review of the literature and armed with scopes, cameras, and recording equipment, some of the area's leading birders, count compiler Bob Schutsky, P.O.R.C. members Frank Haas and Steve Santner, active area birders Ed Pederson and Larry Lewis, fortunately relocated the bird. Their observations, recordings, and photographs verified that we had found a Pacific Slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*), apparently the first one documented east of Kansas. The word spread, birders came from several states, and many saw and heard the little bird that first showed up on the SoLanCo Christmas count.

The challenge.

If anybody reading this is assigned an off-beat area for their Christmas count, and through the years is willing to beat the brush, accept it as a challenge rather than a chore. Who knows what may happen. ♪

The completely revised Second Edition of The Birds of Lancaster County, for which Harold serves as Chairman of the Editorial Committee, should be in print later this year.

See description on Page 135.

Pacific Slope Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis* Lancaster County

Franklin C. Haas

On December 16, 1990, while on the Southern Lancaster County Christmas Bird Count, Joe Meloney, Harold Morrin, Joyce Nettke and Bill Ott found an *Empidonax* flycatcher which they tentatively identified as a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*E. flaviventris*) (see article on page 135). This was reported at the after-count gathering that evening. Upon hearing the report, Bob Schutsky, Steve Santner, Larry Lewis, Ed Pederson and I decided to try to locate the bird and confirm its identification.

The site was located in East Drumore Township about two miles south of the intersection of Routes 272 and 372. We arrived at the site at approximately 9:00 a.m., 17 December, and found the bird about 9:45 a.m.

The bird was typical of *Empidonax* flycatchers in size and shape and general coloration (See photo page 160). The four most significant features on the bird were the following:

1. The throat, breast and belly were washed in bright yellow. Not as bright as a Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), but brighter than a winter American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*). This color is washed out in the photos because of the high-speed film being used (ASA 1600). The bird was very easy to spot when facing the observer because of the brightness of the yellow. The brightness and extent (the throat) of the yellow at this time of year pretty much ruled out all *Empidonax* except Yellow-bellied and the two Westerns [Pacific Slope (*E. difficilis*) and Cordilleran (*E. occidentalis*)].

2. The eye-ring was non-existent above the eye and projected noticeably behind the eye in what is called tear-drop fashion. This shape is typical of both Western forms, while Yellow-bellied's eye-rings typically are uniform, but can appear slightly tear-dropped (Kaufman & Whitney 1986).

3. The bird had a noticeably crested appearance and frequently raised its crest

as it sat, called and fed. This again is typical of the Western forms, the Yellow-bellied typically being more round-headed in appearance (Kaufman & Whitney 1986).

4. The lower mandible appeared light-colored for most, if not all, of its length.

This combination of features lead me to believe that the bird was one of the "Western" flycatchers, not a Yellow-bellied.

Realizing at this point that the bird was probably in the Western Flycatcher group (Pacific Slope Flycatcher or Cordilleran Flycatcher), which can be separated in the field only by call, we decided to play a tape-recording of the Western Flycatcher call and see how it responded. We played the tape, and the bird started calling. At this time I started recording the bird's song on tape for documentation.

The call made by the bird was very close to the call note given on the tape that we were playing, which was the Western Flycatcher (before the split) on the *Field Guide to Western Bird Songs*, by Dr. Peter Kellog, 1975, Cassette 2, Side A. It was a loud "ZEEEP," slightly rising, but not distinctly two-noted.

When later compared with the calls given on the *Guide to Bird Sounds*, National Geographic Society (1985) Cassette 2, Side A, (which gives the "Pacific Coast" and "Rocky Mountains" forms) the calls matched exactly those given by the "Pacific Coast" form.

When compared with the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher call from the same tape, the call was noticeable different in pitch, quality and slur. Both the Yellow-bellied and the Pacific Slope have a slurred note, but the Yellow-bellied note has almost no rise in the tone, while the Pacific Slope rises noticeably.

I therefore concluded that the bird was a Pacific Slope Flycatcher.

The bird was seen and heard by many observers during the following days and was last seen on Wednesday, 26 December 1990.

DeSante and Pyle (1986) show no records of "Western" Flycatcher occurring farther east than Kansas. (This was before the split.) The AOU (1989) cites no extralimital records for Pacific Slope Flycatcher, but does mention casual migration records

for Cordilleran Flycatcher as far east as southwestern Kansas (presumably these are the "Western" Flycatcher records cited by DeSante & Pyle).

It therefore seems safe to say that this is the first documented record of Pacific Slope Flycatcher east of the Mississippi River. ✱

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Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus* Erie County

Ted Floyd

I saw a male Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) in Erie County at 11 a.m. on Friday, 23 November 1990. This bird is classified as a "rarity" in Pennsylvania (Kwater 1990). However, the species is extending its range eastward, and there is increasing evidence that the species may be under-reported in Pennsylvania, particularly in the northwestern counties (Wilhelm 1982).

The bird was near East Fisher Road about 4 kilometers east of the Presque Isle State Park office. I observed the bird for more than 30 minutes as it foraged on rocks and vegetation between the road and Erie Bay. It was generally solitary, occasionally venturing to within several meters of a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus*

month only odd birds are seen. The young appear about the middle of September, and until October 1 are common in the same locations. On the adjacent mainland and the shores farther south the birds are seldom met with, and then only as odd stragglers. Where they stop next and what their course is on departing is a mystery. Probably they keep well out to the open sea, and along with the golden plover wisely skip the United States in the fall flight south."

My previous experience with the species includes five birds in Pennsylvania and one at Cape May, New Jersey. This sighting represents the first record of a Hudsonian Godwit in Lehigh County. ♀

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Second State Record of Pacific Slope Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis* Lancaster County Eric Witmer

A Pacific Slope Flycatcher was observed on the Southern Lancaster County Christmas Bird Count on 15 December 1991. The bird was observed in a wooded ravine with a small stream/spring, near the intersection of Haines Station Road and Grubb Corner Road, Fulton Township, Lancaster County, Pa. The bird was seen from 1100-1145 and again from 1515-1600 hours. The sky was partly cloudy. Observations were made with 8X and 10X binoculars.

Field notes. A small *Empidonax* flycatcher with medium green back, wings, and head with two buffy-yellow wingbars. The breast was yellow down through the undertail coverts. The upper breast had dusky coloration on the sides, giving the

bird a vested look (brighter yellow at center of breast). The head was slightly peaked toward the crown. The eye-ring was incomplete on the top of the eye, very thin (easily not seen) on the bottom portion of the eye, noticeable at the front of the eye and most prominent at the back of the eye tapering away giving it a tear drop look.

The lower mandible was orange and occasionally in better light red-orange. The top mandible was dark. Tail wagging was observed with an occasional wing twitch. The bird was observed mostly low to the ground (<5 feet), but on several instances it was in a deciduous tree 15-25 feet. At one point the flycatcher vocalized high in the tree about five times in about a minute. A thin metallic "zeet" type note was made.

We were familiar with the Pacific Slope Flycatcher which had been found nearby (about seven miles distant) in December 1990.

Initial Observers: Jan Witmer, Tom Garner, Fred Habegger, and myself.

Frank Haas and I photographed the bird the next day and Frank was also able to get a tape recording of it that next day (16 December 1991). Unfortunately, it was not found on subsequent trips the following weeks. ♀

805 Pointview Ave.
Ephrata, PA 17522

Pennsylvania's First Record of Vermillion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* Tioga County Arlene Brown

Pyrocephalus rubinus

Tioga County

Arlene Brown

Dates: 24 and 25 October 1991

Location: Route 549, 15 miles north of Mansfield, 5 miles south of the New York state line. In a pasture with a small creek and a pond. The area is open and relatively flat and low with hawthorne, willow trees, and apple trees. Wooded areas on the edge, large multiflora rose bushes, and high weeds at places.

Observers: 24 October, myself. 25 October, Deuane Hoffman, Barb and Frank Haas, Larry Brown, and Bob Ross.

Weather: 24 October was overcast and

windy with a high of 65°F. 25 October was sunny, quite windy at times, with a high of 70°F.

Description: I was walking back home after spending several hours birding when I saw a bird perched on a hawthorne snag in the middle of the pasture. When I looked at it through my Bausch & Lomb 10X40 Custom binoculars I saw that it was a Vermillion Flycatcher. I had seen one before in California where they are a casual visitor, so I found it easily identifiable, but just had a hard time convincing myself it was here in Pennsylvania. This was just before noon. It was a little smaller than a phoebe, with dark brown above, white throat and upper breast, with streaking on the breast and belly, with undertail coverts a bright peach blush color. The striping on the breast looked dark except on Friday, 25 October 1991 at 1530 h. the light was so that the streaking showed peach blush colored spots and earlier we had noticed that when the wind blew the feathers up on the head it appeared to be peach blush colored, so I feel that it was an immature male.



Vermilion Flycatcher, Jobs Corners, 10/25/91,
Photo by Frank Haas.

Events. I decided after the bird stayed in one place more or less for ten minutes I would run to the house and get the camera (Pentax K1000 with a MACRO 75-210 zoom lens and doubler- 400mm max.). I am not familiar with the camera because Larry, my husband, always comes along



Western Flycatcher sp. P-0389
L. Ahquabi S.P., Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 Tim Schantz

92-38

FUJICOLOR
paper
X 11 492 NNNN 568 111-004

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0389
L. Ahquabi S.P., Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 Tim Schantz

92-38

FUJICOLOR
paper
X 11 492 NNNN 568 111-004

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0389
L. Ahquabi S.P., Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 Tim Schantz

92-38

FUJICOLOR
paper
X 11 492 NNNN 568 111-004

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0389
L. Ahquabi S.P., Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 Tim Schantz

92-38

FUJICOLOR
paper
X 11 492 NNNN 568 111-017



See 92-38

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0391
Yellow-bellied Farallon Is., CA
FA 1989 Tim Schantz

Yellow-bellied Flycatc P-0390
SE Farallon I., CA
FA 1989 Tim Schantz

See 92-38

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0347
L. Ahquabi, Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 T. H. Kent

92-38

Western Flycatcher sp. P-0347
L. Ahquabi, Warren Co., IA
15 Nov 1992 T. H. Kent

92-38

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Western Flycatcher (sp?)

Location: Lake Ahquabi State Park, Warren County, IOWA

Habitat: Woodland edge consisting primarily of honeysuckle and junipers

Date: 14 November 1992

Time: 11:00 to 14:00

15 November 1992

11:30 to 13:45

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: Beth Brown, Sherry Dragula, Bill & Jane Overland, John Miller (11/14/92); Tom Kent, Jim Fuller, Jim Scheib, Ross Silcock, Jim Sinclair, Tim Schantz, John Daniel, Cal & Bernie Knight, David Youngblut, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, Chuck Fuller (11/15/92)

Description of bird: While leading a walk for the Iowa Audubon Council, Beth and I both heard a call note unfamiliar to us and were searching for the bird to go with it when I noticed a small bird dart from a low branch to the grass and return. The size, shape, tail flicking and olive green back were immediately indicative of an *Empidonax* flycatcher. As the bird turned, we observed yellow underparts including the throat, breast and belly. At this point we thought of an extremely late Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. More detailed observation indicated a possible Western Flycatcher. The brown/olive head was large with a noticeable peaked appearance. It looked a bit darker on the very top of the head. The bill was wide with a black upper mandible and dull orange lower mandible. The inside of the mouth was bright orange. The eye ring was yellow and was almond shaped. It was very narrow on the top and bottom and in fact at some angles looked broken at the top. The front of the eye ring was wider but rounded while the back was elongated with a sharp point toward the back of the head. The back was olive green and the wings were gray-brown. Wing bars were buffy as were the inner webs of the primaries. The tertials appeared yellow/buff, giving a golden cast to the inner wing which blended with the darker wing color. The tail was the approximate color of the wings. The legs were gray. From below the bird was nearly uniform pale yellow. The throat was brighter yellow as was a narrow streak through the center of the breast and belly. The color faded to the flanks, which at times looked lightly streaked. This may have been caused by preening because at other times the color was uniform.

WEFL; Ann Johnson
 14-15 November 1992
 Page 2

The primaries were relatively short and extended to the base of the tail from above or about to the end of the undertail coverts below. This short primary projection accentuated the length of the tail. The bird did a lot of tail flicking but concurrent wing flicking was not noticed. It was very active once the sun was out and the edge had warmed somewhat. Both days it was observed only when the sun came out and warmed the grasses, no doubt stirring some insects. It usually stayed close to the edge, perching in low branches and occasionally zipping out to the grasses and seemingly searching for insects. At times it would disappear into the interior of the area for 10-15 minutes and was very difficult to locate. On a few occasions it was observed higher in the cedars, but as a rule it stayed closer to the ground. Juniper and honeysuckle berries were prevalent, providing a supplemental food source.

The call note that Beth and I heard initially was a dry, ascending, two-syllable call "chur-up!". We were never able to ascertain if the call came from the bird in question. Approximately two hours prior to observing the bird on 15 November, Jim Fuller and I heard a dry, two-syllable call reminiscent of a flycatcher coming from cedars adjacent to the area where the bird finally appeared.

Similar species and how eliminated: The date of observation is historically good for a vagrant western flycatcher species, so this was in the back of my mind in assessing the characteristics observed. The presence of both eye ring and wing bars, in addition to size and shape, indicate that the bird fits the *Empidonax* complex. The combination of green back, yellow throat and pure orange lower mandible with no markings would eliminate Least, Hammond's, Dusky, Gray, Buff-breasted, Alder, and Willow Flycatchers. A juvenile Acadian can be eliminated by the short primary extension, color of the wings, size and shape of the eye ring, and active behavior. Only three species are indicated by the green upper parts and yellow under parts. Two are separable only by voice. The choices were between Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Western (Cordilleran and Pacific-slope) Flycatcher. Back color is greener in Yellow-bellied and more olive in Western. Although the back looked olive, this was rather subjective. According to the Audubon Master Guide, behavior would be more indicative of a Yellow-bellied in that the bird was not flicking both tail and wings. According to Kaufman, however, behavior is quite variable. Three characteristics made me lean more toward Western complex. They were peaked appearance to the head (usually smooth and rounded in Yellow-bellied); almond-shaped eye ring (round, narrow, and more even in Yellow-bellied); and browner wings than eastern *Empidonax*. The color of the wings is again subjective, but the contrast between wing color and wing bars was less than the black/white (or even black/buff in fall birds) of eastern birds. Even with the variability that may occur in any *Empidonax*, it is unlikely that these three characteristics, which are common to the Western Flycatcher, would appear simultaneously in a Yellow-bellied

Flycatcher. Further support is found in the Audubon Master Guide to Birding where it states in the description of Western Flycatcher, "...olive wash on the breast, flanks, and especially the sides tends to highlight a midventral yellow stripe" - one of the more obvious characteristics when viewed at close range from the front.

If the call notes heard belonged to this bird, it would indicate a Cordilleran Flycatcher, the most likely vagrant. None of us were able, however, to get the bird to call as we were observing it. Cal Knight played a tape and the bird became very agitated but did not call.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? Initially Beth had reservations about it being Western as opposed to Yellow-bellied, but seemed reasonably satisfied after further observations. Photos in the Master Guide were particularly problematic for her. Although fall *Empidonax* flycatchers are often impossible to identify, I believe the group on 11/15 was generally satisfied with the identification as Western Flycatcher.

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): The bird was observed at distances of 15 to 40 feet through 7X26 binoculars. Periodic sunshine was to our backs, but most of the time the sky was lightly overcast to partly cloudy.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have observed Cordilleran Flycatchers in the Rockies. I am familiar with the regular Iowa species of *Empidonax* flycatchers.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Golden Guide, National Geographic and Kaufman's Advanced Birding were consulted during observation. Further references consulted prior to writing documentation included Peterson's Western Birds, Audubon's Master Guide, Zimmer's The Western Bird Watcher, Pyle's Identification Guide to North American Passerines and Ehrlich, et al., The Birder's Handbook.

How long before field notes made? Notes were dictated during first observation

How long before this form completed? Evening after first observation; updated following evening

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: "Western" Flycatcher; Number: 1

Location: Lake Ahquabi, Warren Co., IA

Date: 15 November 1992; Time: 11:25 to 11:55 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: Found by Ann Johnson on 14 November; seen by many with me.

Habitat and circumstances: Seen along the edge of a large cedar grove in honeysuckle and other cover.

Description of bird: A small flycatcher, the size, shape, and behavior of an empid, was found after waiting for 4.5 hours along the roadside where it had been seen the previous afternoon. It was spotted in a dense bush about 15 minutes after an overcast sky cleared to provide sun on the area with temperature about 35 degrees Fahrenheit. No other birds were present for size comparison. The bird sat upright on small twigs and was quit tame. It frequently flicked its tail upward with bold strokes. We did not see wing twitching. The bill was broad at the base and tapered uniformly to a sharp point. It was quite flat. The upper mandible was dark gray-black and the lower mandible was orange-yellow (more yellow than orange). The dark eye was surrounded by a yellowish ring that was thin at top and bottom, slightly wider anteriorly, and very wide and tapered to a point posteriorly. The throat and upper breast were lemon yellow shading to light gray or gray-yellow on the vent. The top of the head and back were olive green. The head had a slightly crested appearance, probably due to raised feathers. The wing bars were off-white to buff and the flight feathers were dusky black with slight brown tinge. The primary extension was quite short. I do not know how to quantify this -- my judgement is based on looking carefully at empids recently (The photos should show this well.). The tail appeared relatively long and dark gray. The legs appeared dark. Photos were taken at close range by several observers.

Voice: Not heard.

Similar species: The yellow throat, tear drop shaped eye ring, bill shape and color, tail flicking, and short primary extension all fit "Western" Flycatcher.

These features argue against Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Apparently, Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers cannot be separated in the field except by voice or measurements after netting.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Light: Sun behind observers; Distance: As close as 15 feet (est); Optics: 10x binocular, 420 mm lens.

Previous experience: Have seen several in west, two this fall.

References before/after viewing: We looked at Kaufman and NG Guides while viewing and after.

Time of notes: during viewing period; Final typing: 1 day.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL SIGHTING

SPECIES: Western Flycatcher

LOCATION: Along north entrance road to Lake Ahquabi State Park (Warren County).

HABITAT: Woods edge with some cedar trees, shrubs with berries, and undergrowth.

DATE: 15 November, 1992 (11:25-55AM).

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240.

OTHER OBSERVERS: Discovered by Ann Johnson and Beth Brown. Also present were Tom Kent, Jim Scheib, Jim Sinclair, John Daniel, Tim Schantz, Cal and Bernie Knight, David Youngblut. Seen later by Gene and Eloise Armstrong and Chuck Fuller.

BACKGROUND: Ann Johnson reported to the Iowa Birdline that while leading a hike for the Iowa Audubon Council with Beth Brown, they discovered a very yellow empidonax which they identified as a Western Flycatcher. The bird was seen from 11AM-2PM in the same location, and seemed to favor the sunny south facing area along the north side of the entrance road to Lake Ahquabi State Park. Along with Tom Kent and Jim Scheib, I arrived early the next morning to find Tim Schantz already there. Others birders also arrived as the morning wore on. The day was cloudy, but a lattle after 11AM the sun came out. Shortly thereafter, an empidonax flycatcher was seen along the road edge, usually low to the ground.

DESCRIPTION: The general appearance was a distinctly yellowish and greenish bird, about the size of an empidonax flycatcher. It also behaved like a flycatcher.

The head and back were greenish-brown, as were the folded wings and the tail. The crown seemed to be peaked at a point behind the eye. The eye was dark with a creamy-yellow ring which was thickest behind the eye, and terminated in a V-shape. The bill was thick, and had a fairly bright yellow-orange lower mandible which was straight, and a dark upper mandible, which was somewhat curved. The underparts were yellow, with the throat displaying the brightest yellow, and the breast and belly were yellow-white. The vent appeared to be an off-white color. The tail appeared long for an empidonax, and it had a thin yellow line along the sides. The folded wing had two wing bars, which were buffy in color, and the primary extension appeared to be short.

BEHAVIOR: Although it sat still, and at times preened, for

fairly long time periods, it also foraged flycatcher style, appearing to pick off insects on leaves. Most of the time, the bird was low to the ground, rarely more than ten feet high, and often only a foot or two up. The bird regularly flicked its tail up a varying number of times, usually immediately after perching. No vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: No other western or eastern empidonax has a yellow throat, with the exception of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Yellow-bellied has a uniform eye ring, and a dull yellow lower mandible, as well as wings which are darker (black), and contrast more with the underparts. Yellow-bellied also has a more rounded head, and this bird showed a definite peak to the crown.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: Viewed at very close range (10-25 feet) with sun at back. Optics were Swift Audubon binoculars (8.5 X 44).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this bird in Arizona and Colorado a dozen times or more.

FIELD NOTES & REFERENCES: Field notes were prepared in the car on the return trip about an hour after the sighting. No field guides were consulted until after field notes were completed, and then the National Geographic Guide, and Kaufmann's Advanced Birding were consulted. This report was typed two days later.

DESCRIPTION: The general appearance was a distinctly yellowish and greenish bird, about the size of an empidonax flycatcher. It also behaved like a flycatcher.

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BEHAVIOR: Although it sat still, and at times preened, for

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

92-38

What species? ~~Cordilleran~~ Cordilleran Flycatcher How many? 1

Location? Lake Ahquabi State Park, Warren County, Iowa

Type of Habitat? Hillside covered in thick brush and cedars, and a ravine with creek and lake to the

When? date(s): Nov. 15, 1992 time: 7:45 AM to off and on till 8:30 AM ^{South,}

Who? your name and address: Brian Blevis 2003 E. 12th St. Davenport, Iowa

Others with you: Pete Petersen, Corey Blevis, Kelley McKay

Others before or after you: Quite a few!

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A small bird was working from 2ft. to ground level on the south side of the road. The bird was drab olive green with a long tail which was twitching. The bird would flutter to the ground pick up a insect and then flutter up to the small leafless shrub. When I finally got to the point of moving closer the bird, but it flew back into the brush with a empidonax jizz. A little bit later a sharp-shinned hawk flew at eye level through the area that the bird had escaped to. A vocalization was then heard that bonified this specimen as a Cordilleran Flycatcher. It continued to vocalize 4 times more and long enough for the other 3 guys move next to me and hear it. It moved back into the brush eventually far enough to apparently reach the lake shore. (Note: the call was a 2 note whee-seet which matched the tape for Cordilleran from the Western Peterson tape - AFP).

Similar species; how eliminated: Bird on the ground as Kinglet - eliminated by long tail, upright posture when perched. Other Empidonax flycatchers were eliminated by; the time of year, this was a chase specifically for Cordilleran flycatcher, and vocalizations made that were those of Cordilleran flycatcher.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give ~~time~~, distance (how measured), optical equipment. Overcast, with ^{sporadic} clouds. Distances: seen - 15 yards, heard 10 yards and 30 yards.
(Measured by eye)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Familiar with Cordilleran Flycatcher sighted and heard in Colorado on there breeding territory.

References and persons consulted before writing description: This was a chase for a sighted Cordilleran flycatcher or Pacific-slope flycatcher. Peterson tape for vocalization.

How long before field notes made? 4 hrs. this form completed? 6 weeks

Send completed form to FWS Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

9237

92-38



P.O. BOX 300 GENESEO, ILLINOIS 61254
GENESEO PHONE 309-944-4661
TOLL FREE 1-800-383-4661

To -
I finally got
Brian's doc. for the
Cordillera Flych. I
added a note to
describe the vocalization
which I heard. Brian
was the only one of us
who saw the bird.

Ort