

The First Record of Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2018.

Introduction and Distribution

The Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) is a widely distributed species found in mature forests and forested swamps east of the Great Plains in North America (Allen *et al.* 2017). The northern most limit of the Acadian Flycatcher's breeding range extends from extreme southeastern Minnesota in Houston County, but is found irregularly north to Rice, Hennepin, and Chisago Counties (Janssen 1987), southern Wisconsin, north at least to La Crosse, Jefferson, and Brown Counties (Robbins 1991), southern Michigan, north to Oceana, Newaygo, Isabella, and Tuscola Counties (Walkinshaw 1966a, Walkinshaw and Brewer 1991, Granlund *et al.* 1994), extreme southern Ontario in areas bordering the north shore of Lake Erie (Godfrey 1986, Peck and James 1987), west along the Great Lakes Plain, and southeast along the lower Hudson Valley, and eastern coastal lowlands of New York (Eaton 1988a). This species is also found in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, in Berkshire County, the south Connecticut River Valley, and southeastern Massachusetts (Veit and Petersen 1993). The Acadian Flycatcher breeds south to southern Louisiana, but is absent along the immediate Gulf Coast (Allen *et al.* 2017). This species breeds in southern Mississippi, southern Alabama, and the northern peninsula of Florida, south to Levy, Marion, and Duvall Counties, and rarely to east Pasco, north Polk, Seminole, and Volusia Counties (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b). The Acadian Flycatcher also breeds west to eastern Iowa, with its range extending west along the Des Moines River into central Iowa (Fleckenstein 1996a), northern Missouri (Jacobs and Wilson 1997), eastern Kansas (Zimmerman and Patti 1988, Allen *et al.* 2017), extreme south-eastern Nebraska, in Douglas, Nehama, and Richardson Counties (Sharpe *et al.* 2001a), eastern Oklahoma (Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992), and east Texas, but is absent along immediate Gulf Coast, with its range extending from east-central Texas, west to the Edwards Plateau (Oberholser 1974c, Rappole and Blacklock 1985, Allen *et al.* 2017). Although formerly unknown in Vermont and New Hampshire, recent breeding season records in these states (American Ornithologists' Union 1998a) indicate the range may still be expanding northward.

The Acadian Flycatcher is a migratory species that winters from the Caribbean slope of Nicaragua (American Ornithologists' Union 1998a) south through Costa Rica, on both slopes, but mainly on the Caribbean slope and south Pacific slope (Stiles and Skutch 1989, Blake and Loiselle 1992b), in Panama on both slopes, including Pearl Island and Taboguilla Island (Willis 1966c, Ridgely and Gwynne 1989), northern and western Colombia, northwestern Venezuela, and western Ecuador (Hilty and Brown 1986, Paynter 1995, American Ornithologists' Union 1998a, Ridgely *et al.* 1998). The greatest winter concentration of this species is likely to occur from Panama southward (Fitzpatrick 1980b). In North America, there is one record of a

wintering bird found in Miami, Florida, in 1943 where it was seen and heard (Sprunt 1954c, Stevenson and Anderson 1994b), but most winter reports north of main winter range remain unconfirmed (Allen *et al.* 2017).

The Acadian Flycatcher is not recorded as an accidental vagrant away from its home range very often with only scattered records from Arizona, North Dakota, Quebec, New Brunswick (American Ornithologists' Union 1998a), Cayman Islands (Raffaele *et al.* 1998) Iceland (Lewington *et al.* 1992) and recently in Great Britain (BOU 2016).

The Acadian Flycatcher is an accidental vagrant in British Columbia with a single record of a collected specimen from the interior of the province (Todd 1957). This is the only west coast record of this species in North America (Allen *et al.* 2017).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Acadian Flycatcher is covered in all standard North American field guides. The Acadian Flycatcher is a medium-sized *Empidonax* measuring 15 cm in length, with a wingspan of 22.86 cm, and weighing 13 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This species can be difficult to distinguish from both Alder Flycatcher (*E. alnorum*) and Willow Flycatchers (*E. traillii*) (Allen *et al.* 2017). The Acadian Flycatcher has a longer primary extension, a paler face that contrasts less with the white throat unlike Alder Flycatcher and Willow Flycatcher, and the part of the lower face is usually washed with a pale green (Allen *et al.* 2017). These species readily separated by habitat and vocalizations during breeding season (Allen *et al.* 2017). The Willow Flycatcher's song is a "sneezy "fitz-bew", and the song of the Alder Flycatcher is a falling, buzzy "wee-beo" (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Acadian Flycatcher can be confused with Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*E. flaviventris*) in the fall (Allen *et al.* 2017). This is especially true for Acadian Flycatchers with yellowish throats and a yellow wash on the underparts (Allen *et al.* 2017). However, the Acadian Flycatcher is a larger species with a longer bill, longer primary extension, and relatively long and broad tail (Allen *et al.* 2017). Yellow-bellied Flycatcher appears short-billed and short-tailed (Allen *et al.* 2017). The yellow on the throat of the Acadian Flycatcher is usually a clear pale yellow, while on the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, it tends to be a grayish-yellow (Whitney and Kaufman 1986b, Kaufman 1990a). Note that the yellowish colour on the underparts may fade in preserved specimens, thus the relative amount of yellow on older specimens of this and similar species may not be indicative of their appearance in life (Allen *et al.* 2017).

The following identification criteria for Acadian Flycatcher is taken from Allen *et al.* (2017) unless otherwise stated.

This species is a relatively large, long-winged *Empidonax* characterized by an especially long primary extension and a relatively heavy bill that is long, deep, and broad, and has a mostly pale-yellowish lower mandible. The bill is the longest and broadest of any *Empidonax* found in North America. Another important difference the Acadian Flycatcher has from *Empidonax* in the genus are its gray legs and comparatively brighter-green upperparts combined with underparts that have a pale grayish-white throat, olive band across the breast, and a yellow wash on the belly and the undertail coverts. The song is distinctive with an explosive upwardly ascending " TEE-chup " or " PEET-sah ."

Juvenile plumage is similar to that of adults, but wing-bars buffy and body feathers have buff edges creating a scalloped appearance unique among *Empidonax* flycatchers (Whitney and Kaufman 1986b, Kaufman 1990a, Pyle 1997c). Partial molt occurs July-September before fall migration and results in loss of buff tips to the feathers on the back, but most Juvenile wing-coverts are retained, and as a result, the wing-bars are still very buffy after molt.

In Definitive Alternate (breeding) plumage, the upperparts are greenish-olive from the crown to the rump and very pale below. The eye is dark brown (Mumford 1964). This species is slightly paler and brighter green in the malar region. The throat is usually white. There is a faint olive breast-band with a faint yellowish wash on the belly. The eye-ring is narrow, distinct, whitish or yellowish-white. The wings are dark with contrasting buffy wing-bars and tertial edges. The lower mandible is entirely pinkish-yellow and the gape is a fleshy to yellow colour (Phillips et al. 1966a, Whitney and Kaufman 1986b, Pyle 1997c). The legs and feet are gray (Whitney and Kaufman 1986b, Pyle 1997c).

In Basic (winter) plumage, the wing-bars range from buffy-white to rich buff. This plumage is seen on migration as a Prebasic molt that is completed before individuals leave the breeding grounds in the fall. Although the throat is usually white, it may have a pale-yellow or green-wash after the spring and fall molt. The eye-ring may be indistinct in "worn" summer birds. Some birds are largely white or grayish-white below. This appears to be characteristic of individuals with weak breast-bands or worn summer plumage. This species is sexually monomorphic, but males and females can be distinguished during breeding season by cloacal protuberance and brood-patch, respectively. Fall immatures (Basic I plumage) essentially indistinguishable from fall adults, although wing-bars of immatures may be a brighter buff.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Acadian Flycatcher is an accidental vagrant in British Columbia with a single adult male collected by George M. Sutton at Leonie Lake, near Barriere on June 9, 1934 (Todd 1957). The specimen was recorded as an unknown species in the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in

Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, for over 20 years until the bird's identity was realized by curator W. E. Clyde Todd in 1956 and was retagged as specimen P115760 (Todd 1957, CMNH 2017). This is the only record of this species anywhere along the west coast from California to Alaska (Wahl *et al.* 2005, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, OFO 2016, WBRC 2016, Tietz and McCaskie 2017).

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