

The Status and Occurrence of Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Jamie Fenneman.

Introduction and Distribution:

The Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) breeds from California north throughout eastern and southwestern Oregon and north into areas of central Washington along the eastern slopes of the Cascade Range north to Wenatchee (Wahl *et al.* 2005). It also breeds from southern Idaho, throughout Nevada, Utah, parts of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, southern Oklahoma and east to central Texas, as well as throughout northern and central Mexico (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). It winters in the southwestern United States in southern California and Arizona, as well as from Florida through the Gulf States to south coastal Texas south throughout western Mexico and the Pacific slope of northern Central America, south to Nicaragua, as well as along the coast of eastern Mexico (e.g., Tamaulipas, Veracruz) (Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Howell and Webb 2010). The Ash-throated Flycatcher is rare in Costa Rica (Howell and Webb 2010). It is a rare but regular vagrant to western Washington from both coastal locations and those on the western side of the Cascade Mountains (Wahl *et al.* 2005). In British Columbia, the Ash-throated Flycatcher is a rare to annual species that occurs in BC in small numbers each year, with over 80 records occurring throughout the spring to fall period (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). There is a good single observer sight record for Alaska from Juneau in July 1999 (West 2008).

Identification and Similar Species:

The identification of *Myiarchus* flycatchers, which includes Ash-throated Flycatcher can, in some cases, be extremely challenging in many areas of North and South America, particularly where multiple species occur regularly together. This is not the case in British Columbia as any species of *Myiarchus* flycatcher is considered vagrant, with identification highly favouring Ash-throated Flycatcher as there are lots of records for this species. The Ash-throated Flycatcher is covered in all standard North American field guides and is straight-forward to identify. The Ash-throated Flycatcher is a little smaller to an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) in overall size. The adult and juvenile birds are very similar in their overall plumage (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The head is pointed at the nape and is brownish-gray coloured with a gray face and dark eyes (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is small and dark coloured (Sibley 2000). The throat is very pale and grayish white coloured with the chest being a pale gray coloured that extends down onto the upper belly (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The lower belly is a light lemon yellow colour that extends to the undertail coverts (Sibley 2000). The legs are dark coloured (Sibley 2000). The back is a grayish olive to grayish-brown in color (Howell and Webb 2011). The wings are dark brown, coverts and tertials are edged in white, giving the bird two distinct wing bars, secondaries are edged pale lemon with the primaries edged in rufous colour (Howell and Webb

2010). The tail of the adult is rufous, with rufous on the inner webs of the tail feathers with a dark tail tip (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The juvenile plumage is briefly held from the months of June to September (Sibley 2000). The only significant difference in plumage between juvenile and adult is the tail (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The tail of a juvenile, like an adult bird, is rufous, with rufous feathers on the inner webs of the tail feathers but in this case the rufous feathers occur all the way to the tail tip (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The song of the Ash-throated Flycatcher is a series of repeated phrases “*kibrr, kibrr*”, and also a short musical “*kaBRIK*” (Sibley 2000). The calls have a low, flat quality; abrupt, two-syllable phrases (Sibley 2000). The most common call is a sharp “*ki-brrnk-brr*” or “*bik*” (Sibley 2000). In the fall and winter birds give a soft “*prrt*” call (Sibley 2000).

Fortunately, in British Columbia the only other species of this genus that has been recorded is the extremely rare Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) which has three Provincial records (Toochin 1995, Toochin *et al.* 2013). The Great Crested Flycatcher is found in eastern North America found breeding in Canada from eastern Alberta, through central Saskatchewan, south through southern Manitoba, eastern through southern Ontario, southern Quebec to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (Godfrey 1986). In the eastern United States, the Great Crested Flycatcher is found from North Dakota south through Nebraska, Oklahoma, to eastern Texas in the western portion of the species range, and east from New England south along the Atlantic states to Florida (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This species winters from southern Mexico to northern South America (Howell and Webb 2010). It is a very rare species in California, with only 45 accepted records reported by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). All occurred in the fall between early September and early November, with 80% of the occurrence records coming from September 16-October 14 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). This is the same time period in the year that it has been reported from BC. Observers should always scrutinize all *Myiarchus* flycatchers encountered for this species. In the fall of 2013, a bird first identified as an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Chilliwack by inexperienced observers was later proven by photographs to be in fact a misidentified Great Crested Flycatcher (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.).

There are no records from Oregon or Washington State (OFO 2012, WBRC 2012). There is one fall record from Alaska at Middleton Island during the month of September 1990 in the northern Gulf of Alaska (West 2008). Among *Myiarchus* flycatchers, the Great Crested and Ash-throated Flycatchers are relatively easy to differentiate. The Great Crested Flycatcher is a slightly larger bird compared with the Ash-throated Flycatcher and has a conspicuously darker gray throat and chest, richer yellow belly, and more extensively and brighter rufous tail feathers, with the rufous colouration on the inner webs of the tail feathers extending to the tip of the feathers (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Great Crested Flycatcher has an olive wash on

the back and an olive wash to the lower chest (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). It should be watched for in the fall in British Columbia in September and October, which is when the three Provincial records have occurred (Toochin 1995, Toochin *et al.* 2013). Another species to look out for is the Dusky-capped Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*), which occurs as a regular vagrant along the Pacific coast of California and has been recorded in western Oregon, could conceivably occur as a vagrant north to British Columbia (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). It is a smaller, longer- and more slender-billed, and duller species than Ash-throated and, most importantly, has little or no rufous in the tail (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). All species of *Myiarchus* are best confirmed by vocal characteristics if the bird is calling (Roberson 1980, Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation:

The first record of Ash-throated Flycatcher in the British Columbia is a well-documented sight record on June 15, 1944, from Ainsworth in the West Kootenays (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The first conclusive documentation of this species in British Columbia was a collected bird from Marpole in south Vancouver on October 7, 1953. Incredibly, a second individual was captured, banded and released from the same area in south Vancouver on October 11, 1953 (Hughes 1954, Please see Table 1). This record was followed by another sight record from Jericho Park in Vancouver on August 24, 1958 (Erskine 1960, Please see Table 1). During the early 1970s, however, the species began to appear somewhat regularly on the south coast, and by the 1980s it was being reported almost annually, particularly from the Lower Mainland (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1 and Table 2). There have been between one and three records per year in British Columbia during most years over the past three decades, with a maximum of five records in 1991 and 1999 and no reports in 1986, 1989, 1998, 2002, and 2003 (Toochin *et al.* 2013, see Table 1 and Table 2). Approximately 90% of all records of Ash-throated Flycatcher in British Columbia have come from the Georgia Depression, (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). This high percentage likely reflects the high number of observers that live and check the Lower Mainland area. The area from Vancouver east to Chilliwack and Agassiz has consistently produced the most frequent records of this species, with 61 of 73 Georgia Depression records coming from this portion of the ecoregion (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). The remainder of reports in the Georgia Depression have come from southeastern Vancouver Island from Victoria north to Parksville with 15 records, and the Howe Sound/Sunshine Coast region north of Vancouver with 3 records (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). Curiously, only five records have come from western and northern Vancouver Island, including Triangle Island, despite this area's propensity for attracting vagrants (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1). This is likely due to the lack of coverage this area gets by observers in most years. This species is exceedingly rare in the interior of the province, where only seven records have been published these include places such as; Ainsworth, Kleena Kleene, Mackenzie, Prince George and 3 records from Revelstoke (Toochin *et al.* 2013, see

Table 1). Cannings *et al.* (1987) and Campbell *et al.* (1997) both list additional undocumented reports from the interior of the province (Vaseux Lake, Peachland, and the Kamloops area), suggesting a potential pattern of occurrence in the months of June and July east of the Coast-Cascade Mountains. Only single individuals have been documented in British Columbia, with the exception of a single report of three birds together from August 16-18, 1999 at Burns Bog, Delta (Toochin *et al.* 2013, see Table 1). Vagrants typically occur in brushy habitats such as hedgerows, brushy estuaries, suburban parks and gardens, and seaside thickets (Campbell *et al.* 1997). They are often somewhat more secretive than other flycatchers and spend a considerable amount of time concealed within the vegetation (Campbell *et al.* 1997).

In Washington, breeding birds generally occur between mid-May and August, with some early arrivals appearing in late April (Wahl *et al.* 2005). This spring pattern of occurrence is also found in British Columbia where this species is a vagrant. Ash-throated Flycatcher records in British Columbia have occurred during two distinct periods: a small pulse of records has occurred in late spring/early summer (late May through early July), while a much larger number of records has occurred during the fall (mid-August through mid-November) (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 3). A small number of records has occurred during the last half of July and the first half of August, and there is a single winter (December) record from the Fraser River delta (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 3). The frequency of breeding season (June/July) records has noticeably increased over the past five years (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 3). For example, between 2008 and 2013, eight out of the seventeen reports in the province were from the May/June period (Toochin *et al.* 2013, see Table 1). Individuals are commonly seen on only a single day, or perhaps two or three days in a row, but a small number of long-staying birds have lingered in the fall; the maximum stay of a vagrant to British Columbia is a bird that remained at Jericho Park in Vancouver for 58 days from August 16-October 12, 1988 (Toochin *et al.* 2013, Please see Table 1).



Figure 1: Record #63: Ash-throated Flycatcher along 72nd Street, Delta on October 22, 2004.
Photos © Rick Toochin.



Figures 2 & 3: Record #63: Ash-throated Flycatcher along 72nd Street, Delta on November 6, 2004.
Photos © Randy Findlay.



Figure 4: Record #72: Ash-throated Flycatcher at Mugaha Marsh Banding Station, Mackenzie on August 26, 2008. Photo © James Bradley.

Table 1: Records of Ash-throated Flycatcher for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult June 15, 1944: Ainsworth, West Kootenays (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 2.(1) adult male October 7, 1953: W.M. Hughes (specimen: UBC 10547) Marpole, Vancouver (Hughes 1954)
- 3.(1) unknown October 11, 1953: W.M. Hughes (banded & released) Marpole, Vancouver (Hughes 1954)
- 4.(1) unknown August 24, 1958: AJE: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Rogers 1959, Erskine 1960)
- 5.(1) adult August 15, 1964: Kleena Kleene (Roberson 1980)
- 6.(1) adult June 27, 1971: 13 km outside of Squamish, Alice Lake Provincial Park (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 7.(1) unknown September 9-11, 1971: GAP, WCW, RRW, mobs (BC Photo 176) Ambleside Park, West Vancouver (Campbell *et al.* 1972)
- 8.(1) unknown September 13, 1971: REL: 1375 W. 57th Ave., Vancouver (Campbell *et al.* 1972)
- 9.(1) immature November 14, 1971: Vargas Island, West coast of Vancouver Island (Hatler *et al.* 1978)
- 10.(1) immature November 14, 1972: Ucluelet, west coast of Vancouver Island (Hatler *et al.* 1978)
- 11.(1) unknown September 2, 1975: R.B. Hay: UBC Endowment Lands, Vancouver (Shepard 1976, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 12.(1) unknown August 28, 1976: Mark Gardiner: River Road, Maple Ridge (Shepard 1977a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 13.(1) unknown September 22-25, 1976: JEVG, BMK, mobs: RMBS, Ladner (Shepard 1977a, Shepard 1977b, Toochin 2012a)[Originally identified as a Brown Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) formerly called Wied's Crested Flycatcher]
- 14.(1) unknown October 11-12, 1976: M. Wynja, mobs: Sea Island, Richmond (Toochin 2012a) [Originally identified as a Brown Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) formerly called Wied's Crested Flycatcher]
- 15.(1) adult June 15, 1980: Dick & Suzanne Webb: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Harrington-Tweit *et al.* 1984, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 16.(1) immature September 13, 1980: BMK: Stanley Park, Vancouver (Hunn and Mattocks 1981, Toochin 2012a)
- 17.(1) immature October 3-18, 1980: Doug Haddow, mobs: Sea Island, Richmond (Hunn and Mattocks 1981, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 18.(1) immature October 3-4, 1981: ALG, ECS (photo) 6107 216th St., Langley (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 19.(1) immature September 11, 1981: (photo) Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Campbell *et al.* 1997)

- 20.(1) immature September 12, 1982: Dale Jensen, Eric Keranen (photo) Blackie Spit, White Rock, Ladner (Campbell 1982, Weber 1985, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 21.(1) immature September 12, 1982: Colin Butt, mobs: Ambleside Park, West Vancouver (Weber 1985, Toochin 2012a)
- 22.(1) adult July 1, 1983: JT, PW, KH: Pitt Meadows (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 23.(1) immature August 29-30, 1983: Mike & Barb McGrenere, mobs: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Hunn and Mattocks 1984, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 24.(1) immature September 7, 1983: Mike Shepard : Sandhill Creek, Long Beach (Hunn and Mattocks 1984, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 25.(1) age unknown October 16, 1983: Copper Canyon, outside Chemainus (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 26.(1)age unknown September 23, 1984: Hank Vander Pol: Saanich (Hunn and Mattocks 1985, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 27.(1) unknown October 2, 1984: Frank Walker: Beach Grove, Tsawwassen (Hunn and Mattocks 1985, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 28.(1) immature November 17, 1984: DMP, CA, DS: Brunswick Point, Ladner (Toochin 2012a)
- 29.(1) immature September 15, 1985: DMP, Frank Walker, DS: 3672 West 1st Ave., Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 30.(1)immature November 2, 1985: Beach Grove, Tsawwassen (Campbell 1986a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 31.(1) immature August 23, 1987: Ucluelet, west coast of Vancouver Island (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 32.(1) immature August 26, 1987: Sandy Blair: Kitsilano Point, Vancouver (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 33.(1) immature September 3, 1987: Jost Von Der Linde, mobs: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 34.(1) adult June 12, 1988: DMP: 150th St., White Rock, Surrey (Toochin 2012a)
- 35.(1) adult June 25, 1988: BAM: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 36.(1) immature August 16-October 12, 1988: Rick Toochin, Jost Von Der Linde, mobs: Jericho Park, Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 37.(1) adult May 29, 1990: Keith Taylor: Mount Tolmie, Victoria (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 38.(1) adult June 23, 1991: Nanaimo (Gillespie 1992, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 39.(1) adult July 1, 1991: mobs: Maplewood Conservation Area, North Vancouver (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 40.(1) adult July 27, 1991: Rick and Danny Tyson, TP (photo) Maplewood Conservation Area, North Vancouver (Siddle 1991c, Dorsey 1996a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 41.(1) adult July 27, 1991: Wilson Creek (Greenfield 1991, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 42.(1) immature August 18-October 8, 1991: JL, mobs: Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Siddle 1992, Dorsey 1996a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)

- 43.(1) immature September 26, 1992: Ron Satterfield, and other observers: Mount Tolmie, Victoria (Bain and Holder 1992)
- 44.(1) immature November 9-10, 1992: John Kalman: Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge, Ladner (Siddle 1993a, Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 45.(1) adult July 16, 1993: Gerry Ansell, and other observers: Central Saanich (Bain and Holder 1993, Siddle 1993b, Davidson 1994)
- 46.(1) adult June 12, 1994: Ian Jones, and other observers: Triangle Island (Jones and Cooke 1994)
- 47.(1) immature August 13, 1994: HM, JAM, mobs: Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Bowling 1995, Davidson 1995, Toochin 2012a)
- 48.(1) age unknown August 26, 1995: Doug Powell: Revelstoke (Bowling 1996a)
- 49.(1) age unknown September 3, 1995: W. Hochachka: near Beacon Hill Park, Victoria (Bowling 1996)
- 50.(1) immature October 11-25, 1995: Conney Hawley, and other observers: near Beacon Hill Park (Bowling 1996)
- 51.(1) immature October 16, 1995: Martin Gebauer (photo) near Katzie Slough, Pitt Meadows (Toochin 2012a)
- 52.(1) immature September 2-6, 1996: Guy Monty: Englishmen River Estuary (Bowling 1997)
- 53.(1) immature August 24-26, 1997: Evelyn Whiteside, Rick Toochin: Cecil Green Park, Pt. Grey, Vancouver (Plath 2000, Toochin 2012a)
- 54.(1) immature October 5, 1997: mobs: Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Bowling 1998, Toochin 2012a)
- 55.(3) juvenile August 16-18, 1999: Martin Gebauer, mobs: Burns Bog, Delta (Shepard 2000a, Toochin 2012a)
- 56.(1) juvenile August 27, 1999: Rick Toochin: Burns Bog, Delta (Shepard 2000, Toochin 2012a)
- 57.(1) juvenile August 28, 1999: C. Knox: Tsawwassen (Shepard 2000, Toochin 2012a)
- 58.(1) immature September 3, 1999: Gord Gadsden: Cheam Lake Wetlands, Popkum (Shepard 2000, Toochin 2012c)
- 59.(1) juvenile September 5-6, 1999: Peter Candido, mobs: Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Shepard 2000, Toochin 2012a)
- 60.(1) immature December 18-28, 2000: John Ireland, mobs (photo) Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Cecile 2001, Toochin 2012a)
- 61.(1) juvenile August 26-October 14, 2001: Vivika Omen, mobs: Beach Grove Elementary School, Tsawwassen (Cecile 2002, Toochin 2012a)
- 62.(1) adult June 18, 2004: Jukka Jantunen, mobs (photo) Halfmoon Bay, Sunshine Coast (Cecile 2004)
- 63.(1) immature October 21-November 15, 2004: Carlo Giovanella, mobs (photo) along Hedgerow at 72nd Street, Boundary Bay (Cecile 2005, Toochin 2012a)

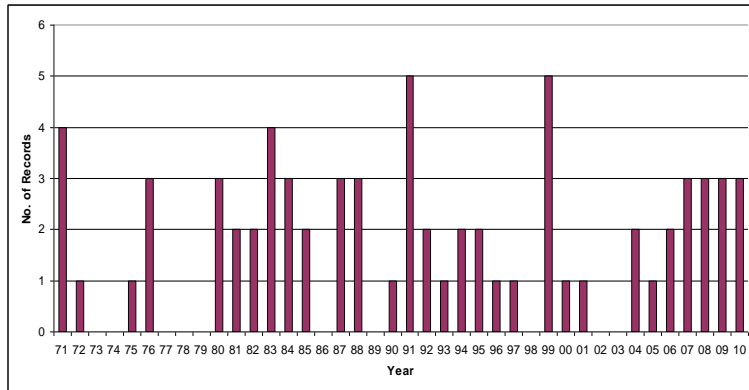
- 64.(1) immature September 5-6, 2005: David Allinson, Chris Saunders, Gabe David: RPBO Banding Station, Metchosin (Cecile 2006a)
- 65.(1) adult May 24, 2006: Gabe David: RPBO Banding Station, Metchosin (Cecile 2006b)
- 66.(1) adult June 24, 2006: Carlo Giovanella, mobs (photo) Iona Island, North Outer Pond, Richmond (Toochin 2012a)
- 67.(1) immature September 2- October 12, 2007: Kevin Jones, mobs (photo) Whorley Road, Agassiz (Toochin 2012c)
- 68.(1) immature September 19, 2007: Keith Riding: Cecil Green Park, UBC, Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 69.(1) immature October 26, 2007: Marie O'Shaughnessy, and other observers (photo) Oak Bay, Victoria (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 70.(1) adult June 2, 2008: *fide Victoria RBA*: Duncan (Toochin *et al.* 2013b)
- 71.(1) adult June 7, 2008: Marcy and David Allinson: Colwood Creek Park, Victoria (Cecile 2008)
- 72.(1) immature August 26, 2008: (photo: banded and released) Mugaha Marsh, Mackenzie (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 73.(1) immature September 19, 2008: N. Edmonds, M. McNicholl: Iona Island South Jetty Tip, Richmond (Toochin 2012a)
- 74.(1) adult June 21, 2009: Jeremiah Kennedy, mobs (photo) Colony Farm (Toochin 2012a)
- 75.(1) immature August 19, 2009: Tom Bearss, mobs (photo) Serpentine Fenn, Surrey (Toochin 2012a)
- 76.(1) immature August 22, 2009: John Vooy: Seen 500 m west of Mission Bridge (Toochin 2012c)
- 77.(1) adult May 25, 2010: Tak Shibata (photo) Colony Farm, Coquitlum side (Toochin 2012a)
- 78.(1) adult August 30, 2010: Machete Island, Revelstoke (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 79.(1) adult June 19, 2010: Anne Cooper: Beacon Hill Park, Victoria (Charlesworth 2010)
- 80.(1) adult June 14-15, 2011: Kevin Jones, mobs (photo) Whorley Road, Agassiz (Toochin 2012c)
81. (1) adult June 29-30, 2011: Quentin Brown, mobs: Maplewood Conservation Area, North Vancouver (Toochin 2012a)
- 82.(1) adult November 1, 2011: (photo) Machete Island, Revelstoke (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 83.(1) adult July 12, 2012: Rick Toochin: Tuyttens Road, Agassiz (Toochin 2012c)
- 84.(1) adult May 23, 2013: Kevin Jones, mobs (photo) Whorley Road, Agassiz (Toochin *et al.* 2013a)
- 85.(1) adult July 1, 2013: Rick Toochin, mobs: 272nd Street and 25th Ave., Aldergrove (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 86.(1) adult November 1-2, 2013: Cathy Antoniazzi, mobs (photo) Prince George (J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.)

87.(1) adult June 14-15, 2014: mobs (photo) Jordan River (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.)

Hypothetical Records:

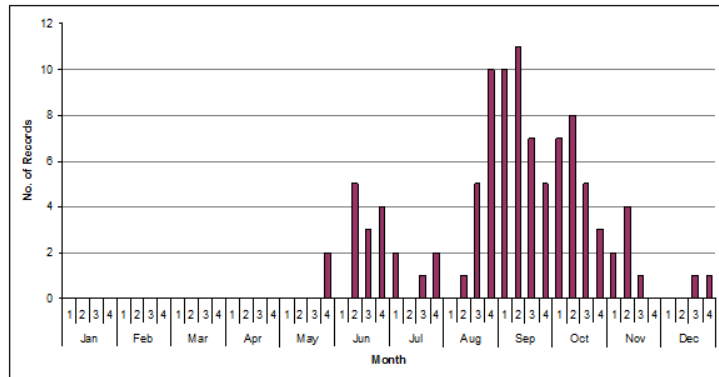
- 1.(1) adult June 24, 1966: L. Orcutt: Vaseux Lake, south Okanagan (Cannings *et al.* 1987)
- 2.(1) adult July 20, 1966: G. P. Sirk: Peachland, Okanagan (Cannings *et al.* 1987)
- 3.(1) age unknown October 12, 1981: (photo) no location given (Campbell *et al.* 1997)
- 4.(1) age unknown October 4, 1982: no location given (Campbell *et al.* 1997)

Table 2: Annual number of Ash-throated Flycatcher records in British Columbia:



Annual number of Ash-throated Flycatcher records in British Columbia between 1971 and 2010.

Table 3: Seasonal distribution of Ash-throated Flycatcher records in British Columbia:



Seasonal distribution of Ash-throated Flycatcher records in British Columbia. Note the appearance of two peaks of occurrence: one in the spring and a larger one through the fall.

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Flycatcher photographs. All photos are used with permission of the photographer and are fully protected by copyright law.

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