The Ash-throated Flycatcher in the East: An Overview

A western-southwestern species formerly regarded as an accidental visitorin the East now apparently of regular occurrence

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On Sunday, December 19, 1979, I studied an Ash-throated Flycatcher *(Myiarchus cinerascens)* for more than an hour in a brushy backyard in Haymarket, Prince William County, Virginia. The flycatcher was initially perched low in a silver maple tree *(Acer saccharinum* L.) 12 m from a kitchen window through which I was watching. The bird then flew to within 2 m of the window and perched on a chain-link fence. My first impression was that the bird resembled a Great Crested Flycatcher *(Myiarchus crinitus),* the common *Myiarchus* species in the East—a very late one—but the proportions of the bird appeared different from those of the latter species.

The flycatcher was 15-18 cm in length, mostly brownish-gray, with two whitish wingbars. Both mandibles were entirely dark to the base and similar in size. The eyes appeared black. The crown was ruffled and slightly darker than the rest of the unmarked head, nape, and back. The chin, throat, and breast appeared to be a creamy white color that blended gradually into pale lemon on the belly. Many secondaries were edged with white; the outer four or five were rich rufous. The tail appeared solid brown above and rufous below; the rufous was especially apparent when the tail was fanned. Characteristics that did not conform to those of the Great Crested Flycatcher were the white chin, throat, and breast; the noticeably smaller, slimmer bill; the darker-brown tail; and the smaller size of the bird.

The flycatcher flew eight times while under observation and landed preferentially in small (less than 3-m-tall) trees within 70 m of the house. Its flight was low and direct. It habitually perched less than 2 m high and gleaned insects from the leafless branches rather than catching them in flight, although insects were flying. Although I did not have an opportunity to photograph the flycatcher, it was seen again two days later by David Smith of Haymarket, who independently identified the bird as an Ash-throated Flycatcher. Reports of the sighting with substantiating notes from both observers were subsequently sent to the editor of the *Raven* and to the area compiler for *American Birds.*

On Sunday, January 20, 1980, Ellen G. Fader of Arlington, Virginia, and I observed an Ash-throated Flycatcher on Virginia Key, Dade County, Florida. When first spotted, the bird was perched 2 m above the ground in a deciduous sapling. We were standing quietly in the shade 5 m away and were able to study the bird for 2 minutes, after which it flew into the tree under which we were standing, where it afforded us some good, but mainly only silhouetted, views. The flycatcher seen on Virginia Key was identical in every respect to the flycatcher seen in Haymarket. Unlike the Haymarket bird, however, which appeared to be quite solitary, the Virginia Key bird seemed to be loosely associated with a roving interspecific group of Yellow-rumped Warblers *(Dendroica coronata),* Palm Warblers *(D. palmarum),* and other species. The sighting was immediately reported to the Tropical Audubon Society. Our efforts to relocate the bird on Virginia Key the following weekend were unsuccessful. The sighting was subsequently reported to the Florida regional compiler for *American Birds.*

As a result of these two sightings, I became interested in determining the status of the Ash-throated Flycatcher in the East. I report here an annotated list of sightings, seasonal and geographic patterns of sightings, and characteristics by which field observers can distinguish the species of *Myiarchus* flycatchers found in America north of Mexico from the Ash-throated Flycatcher.

HISTORICAL SIGHTINGS

THE ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER is an insectivorous species of the family Tyrannidae that inhabits the temperate desert and scrub communities and ranges into the pine-oak woodlands of western North America. Its breeding range extends from the southern tip of the central plateau of Mexico (southern San Luis Potosi and northern Guanajuato and Jalisco) north to Oregon and east to central Texas (Lanyon 1963). The 1957 A.O.U. Check-list recognizes two races of the Ash-throated Flycatcher. The nominate form, *M. c. cinerascens* (Lawrence), breeds from southwestern Oregon and eastern Washington, southern Idaho, southwestern Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and northern and central Texas south to southern Baja California, Guerrero, and southwestern Tamaulipas and winters from northern Baja California, southeastern California, central Arizona, and southern Tamaulipas south to Guatemala and El Salvador, casually to Costa Rica and rarely southwestern California (A.O.U.

1957). All of this range is occupied by *M. cinerascens cinerascens,* except that *M. c. pertinax* (Baird) is resident in Baja California south of latitude 29° (Lanyon, 1963b) and on San Esteban Island, Sonora (A.O.U., 1957).

Since 1911, when a specimen was collected in Beltsville, Prince Georges County, Maryland (Simon 1958), Ash-throated Flycatchers have been observed with increasing frequency east of the Mississippi River in a region that lies outside of the breeding or previously known wintering range of either race. In fact, the Ash-throated Flycatcher had been reported in the East only 12 times before 1970 and more than 20 times since then. All collected specimens have been of the nominate race. Known records of the Ash-throated Flycatcher east of the Mississippi River (excluding Louisiana, which appears to mark the eastern limit of its regular wintering range and which I will discuss later) are as follow:

THE RECORDS

Alabama

Collected at Dauphin Island, Mobile Co., November 2, 1958 (Williams 1959) or November 3 (Silcock 1975) by L.E. Williams, Jr., specimen is now 4645.1a in the Florida St. Univ. Mus. collection (Williams, 1959); seen at Bon Secour, Baldwin Co., October 24, 1964 by P.F. Chandler (Imhof 1976); seen at Dauphin Island October 7-8, 1965 by J.L. Dorn *et al. (Ibid.);* seen at Dauphin Island May 3, 1968 by J.L. Dorn *et al. (Ibid.);* seen at Magnolia Springs, Baldwin Co., September 17, 1971 by P.F. Chandler *(Ibid.);* and seen at Fort Morgan October 27, 1974 by T.A. Imhof *et al.* (Purrington 1975).

Florida

Collected at Town Point on the south side of Pensacola Bay opposite the city of Pensacola, Escambia Co., December 24, 1944, after being found earlier by E.J. Koestner *et al.* (Weston 1946); seen at Fair Point near Pensacola October 21, 1956 by F.M. Weston within 0.4 km of the site of the first Florida record, specimen is now in the collection of L.E. Pate of Pensacola (Weston 1957); seen near Gulf Breeze, Santa Rosa Co., October 20, 1975 (Purrington, 1976); seen on Virginia Key near Miami Beach, Dade Co., January 20, 1980 by W.L Murphy and E.G. Fader.

Illinois

Collected at Washington Park, Springfield, Sangamon Co., (adult female), November 9, 1973 after being initially seen on November 2, specimen is now 605794 in the Ill. St. Mus. collection (Kleen 1974; Bohlen 1975). This and the Ontario record constitute the only sightings of Ash-throated Flycatchers away from Atlantic/Gulf states.

Maine

Seen at Appledore Island, Isles of Shoals, September 17 (Finch 1972) through September 20 (Silcock 1975), 1971 by O.H. Hewitt (Finch 1972); seen at Bar Harbor, Hancock Co., November 21, 1975, by W.C. Russell (Finch 1976).

Maryland

Collected at Beltsville, Prince Georges Co., November 25, 1911 by E.B. Marshall, specimen was identified years later by S. Amy and is now in the U.S.N.M. bird collection (cited by Simon 1958; original report was not published); collected at Monkton (immature male) November 26,1957, initially seen November 22, specimen is now 465388 in the U.S.N.M. collection (Simon 1958); seen at Emmitsburg, Frederick Co., December 4, 1962 by J.W. Richards (Scott and Cutler 1963).

Massachusetts

Photographed at Gloucester, Essex Co., present from November 25 to December 3, 1972, initially discovered by S. Harty and J. Twisdom at Eastern Point (Finch 1973); seen at Orleans, Barnstable Co., November 22, 1975 (Finch 1976); seen at Rowley, Essex Co., May 18-24, 1979 (Heil and Stymeist 1980); seen at Cambridge, Middlesex Co., December 1-9, 1979 (Vickery 1980); seen at Wellesley, Norfolk Co., during the week of November 10, 1980 *(fide* D.L. Emerson).

New York

Photographed at Larchmont, Westchester Co., present from November 22 to 24, 1970, initially discovered by S. Bahrt, photograph on file with the A.M.N.H. (Boyajian 1971; Bull 1974); collected at Ridge, Suffolk Co., December 5, 1973 by W.E. Lanyon, adult female initially discovered by J. Ruscica and G. Raynor December 1, mist-netted December 5, placed in an aviary but subsequently died, specimen is now 819464 in A.M.N.H. bird collection (Bull 1974; Raynor and Ruscica 1974); seen at Riis Park, Brooklyn, May 10, 1978 by P.A. Bacinski, probably an adult female (no response to audio playback) (Paxton *et al.* 1978).

North Carolina

Seen at Raleigh, Wake Co., May 15, 1973 by R. Silcock (Teulings 1973); seen at Pea Island N.W.R. Dare Co., June 3, 1974 by P. A. Buckley (Teulings 1974).

Ontario

Seen at Point Pelee, November 24, 1962 (Stirrett, 1973; James *et al.* 1976).

Quebec

Seen at Franquelin October 10, 1977 by J.M. Belisle (David and Gosselin 1978). This sighting constitutes the only report from Canada east of Ontario.

Rhode Island

Collected on Block Island, Newport Co., September 15, 1960 by J. Baird, specimen is now 261402 in the M.C.Z., Cambridge (Baird 1962); seen at Block Island September 25,

1976 by F.P. Frazier, Jr. (Finch 1977); photographed at East Providence, Providence Co., by R. Bowen after initial discovery by H. Willoughby, present November 12 through at least November 30, 1979 *(fide* D.L. Emerson) (incorrectly reported in *American Birds* as seen at Acoaxet, Massachusetts, *fide* D.L. Emerson).

Virginia

Seen at Little Creek, Virginia Beach-Norfolk, December 26, 1957 by F.C. Richardson and W.F. Rountrey (Potter 1958; Richardson 1958); seen at Chincoteague N.W.R., Accomac Co., December 13-14, 1969 by S. Stepinoff (Stepinoff 1970); photographed at Cheriton, Northampton Co., December 27-30, 1978, Natl. Photoduplicate File No. 454-1C (Scott 1979); seen at Haymarket, Prince William Co., December 9, 1979 by W.L. Murphy and D. Smith; and photographed at Kiptopeke, Northampton Co., December 30-31, 1979 by M. Tove, seen by many observers (Armistead 1980).

PATTERNS OF DISTRIBUTION

Seasonal

THE SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION of the Ash-throated Flycatcher in the East is shown in Figure 1. Most records are from September to December, with late November and early December accounting for peak numbers of observations. Although observation dates range widely, periods of highest frequency in certain states (north to south) have been as follow:

Three waves of movement are apparent. The first wave arrives in eastern Canada and New England and in Alabama from mid-September through early October. The second wave arrives in Alabama and Louisiana in late October and in more northern regions in late November and early December. The third wave, composed of spring vagrants, appears from the Southeast to New York from early May to early June (John P. Hubbard, pers. comm.*)*.

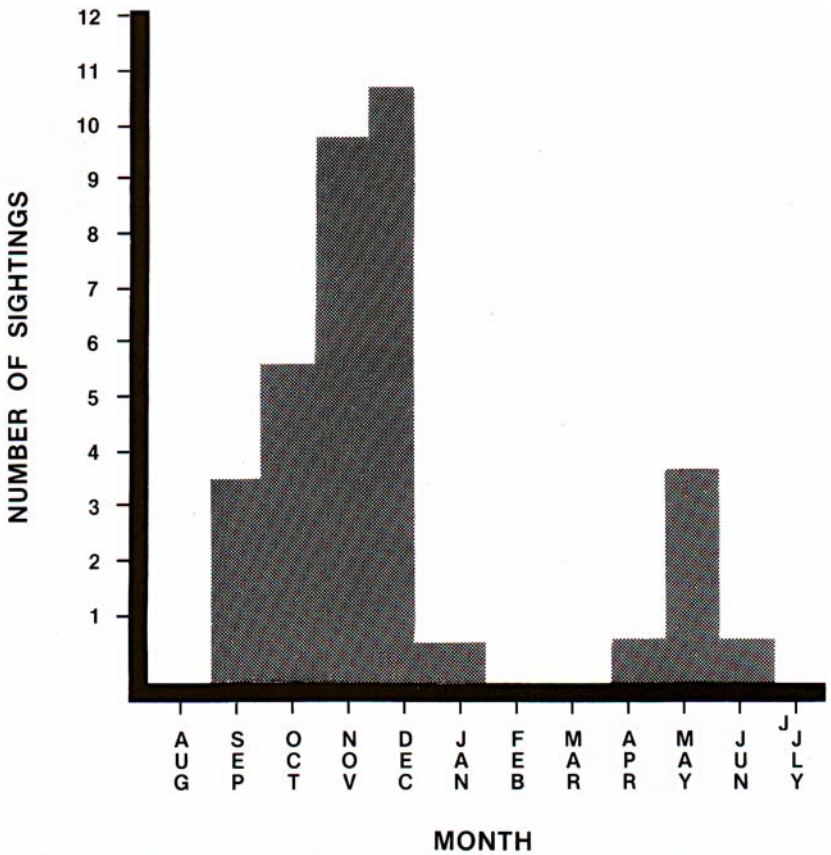

Figure 1. *Seasonal distribution of sightings of the Ash-throated Flycatcher east of the Mississippi River, 1911 to mid-1980.*

State	*Peak # of reports*	*# reports*
Va.	Dec. 9-Dec. 31	5
Mass.	Nov. 10-Dec. 9	4
Md.	Nov. 25-Dec. 4	3
Ala.	Oct. 7-Oct. 27	3
N.Y.	Nov. 21-Dec. 21	2

Geographic

Twelve of the 26 states and five provinces east of the Mississippi River have accounted for all of the sightings of the Ash-throated Flycatcher in the East. Of these 10 states, all but three (Illinois, Ontario, and Quebec) are coastal. Several published observations may have been of the same bird, especially in cases in which both sightings were made in the same area during a brief period of time. For example, two sightings in New England (November 12-30 and December 1-9, 1979 in Rhode Island and in a nearby region of Massachusetts, respectively) could very well have been of the same wandering bird. Many western strays appear to wander eastward until they reach the coast; then they head south. Thus the flycatcher observed December 9, 1979 in Haymarket, Virginia could well have been the same bird that was photographed three weeks later (December 30-31, 1979) at Kiptopeke during the Cape Charles CBC. Similarly, reports of observations made on December 13-14 and 27-30, 1978 at Chincoteague and Cheriton, Virginia, respectively, may have been of the same bird. That these locations are both situated on the same narrow coastal peninsula may add strength to the "same bird" hypothesis.

WINTER SURVIVAL IN THE EAST

IT IS POSSIBLE that the Ash-throated Flycatchers observed in the East in spring have overwintered somewhere in the Southeast. Silcock (1975) wrote,

> "That the Raleigh bird described above [May 16, 1973] represents the first spring record for the east presents a problem. It may be that a

> fall disperser which overwinters (and perhaps is disoriented also) may find itself in spring far removed from its 'area of established distribution' (Johnston, 1961), and for many reasons (most notably lack of a mate) fails to establish a new breeding population. In other words, such an occurrence may be regarded as an extreme case of the normal phenomenon of dispersal (Johnston, 1961)."

Similarly, Stymeist (Heil and Stymeist 1980) raised the question of whether a bird observed May 18-24, 1979 in Massachusetts could have been one of several reported during the previous fall and winter that might have overwintered in the Southeast.

The only midwinter sighting of an Ash-throated Flycatcher east of the Mississippi River was by Murphy and Fader on Virginia Key, Florida (January 20, 1980). Because that bird was apparently healthy, I speculate that it could have survived for the remainder of the winter in the Keys, feeding on the abundant insect life that is active there throughout the year. The generally low, brushy thickets of mangroves *(Rhizophora* spp.) in the Keys could harbor a rather sizable population of Ash-throated Flycatchers, and the inaccessibility of a large part of this habitat would make a thorough census of the population difficult if not impossible. Thus I hypothesize that the Florida Keys might be a possible overwintering area for the Ash-throated Flycatcher in the East, as they are for small populations of other western species, such as Western Kingbirds *(Tyrannus verticalis)* and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers *(Muscivora forficata [Tyrannus forficatus]).* [In the text following, changes in taxonomy and nomenclature from the A.O.U. Checklist, 6th Edition, 1983, are shown in brackets.]

Another possible wintering ground for "eastern" Ash-throated Flycatchers could be along the Gulf Coast. Winter records of Ash-throated Flycatchers in coastal Louisiana are not uncommon. Of particular interest are four records of mid- and late-winter birds: collected at the town of University, 5 miles south of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Parish, March 20, 1943 (Lowery 1974); collected (female) at False River opposite New Roads, Point Coupe Parish, December 23, 1945 *(Ibid.);* collected at Johnson Bayou, Cameron Parish, January 4, 1948 (cited in Simon 1958); and collected at Willow Island, Cameron Parish, April 1, 1957 *(Ibid.).*

In his treatment of the species in Louisiana, Lowery (1974) wrote,

> "The species is rare but of fairly regular annual occurrence in winter in southern Louisiana, particularly in the New Orleans area and in the delta region south of that city. It has also been seen on Grand Terre Island, at False River, and on at least 5 occasions in Cameron Parish."

Purrington (1976) noted that most Louisiana reports of winter *Myiarchus* flycatchers are from Cameron Parish, which might be expected as it is the westernmost of the coastal parishes and thus is closest to the normal range of the species. Cameron Parish is also heavily birded as it is one of the few coastal areas of western Louisiana that is easily accessible.

Several reports of Ash-throated Flycatchers found in the East mentioned that the birds were observed feeding. Bohlen (1975) stated that a bird collected in Illinois had been actively flycatching in deciduous woods and that "during cold periods the bird fed by picking insects off the foliage instead of flying." The Illinois bird endured a 3.3-cm (1.3-in.) snowfall and a 6-day temperature range of 11.7° to -5°C. (53° to 23°F.). The gizzard contained several specimens of insects (Hemiptera: Coreidae, probably *Leptoglossus* spp.). The Ash-throated Flycatcher that I observed in Virginia, like the Illinois bird, also gleaned insects from twigs rather than catching them in flight. Simon (1958) reported that,

> "Mr. Robert T. Mitchell of the Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, Maryland, examined the droppings collected during the 24-hour period that the [Maryland] bird was kept alive [November 25, 1957]. Of the 0.5cc analyzed, three grasshoppers comprised 85 per cent, skin of fruit 10 percent and unidentified insect (?) fragments 5 per cent."

Finch (1973) reported that a bird seen in early winter in Massachusetts subsisted on *Pyracantha* and yew *(Taxus* sp.) berries. In contrast to these reports of Ash-throated Flycatchers successfully foraging in late fall and early winter, Bull (1974) reported that an examination of a specimen obtained in early December in New York showed the stomach and intestine to be empty, the muscle masses greatly reduced, and the plumage heavily infested with *Mallophaga,* which are lice whose populations increase rapidly on birds so weakened as to be unable to groom themselves properly.

HYPOTHESES FOR ABNORMAL MIGRATORY PATTERNS

ALTHOUGH THE RISE in popularity in recent years of birding as a hobby and the current availability of excellent field guides have no doubt improved the chances of western strays being correctly identified when seen in the East, these factors might not fully account for the current trend toward increased numbers of sightings of Ash-throated Flycatchers in the East. Silcock (1975) presented several hypotheses for the straying of western birds to the eastern United States. He emphasized two main behavioral patterns, normal dispersion and abnormal migratory movement (disorientation), as factors which might cause this phenomenon. Silcock quoted Berndt and Sternberg (1968), who stated,

> "An examination of recoveries of female Pied Flycatchers *(Ficedula hypoleuca)* shows that many first breed a considerable distance from their birthplace, in contrast to the situation of the Blue Tit *(Parus caeruleus)* and Nuthatch *(Pusilla* [sic] *europaea).* The degree of such dispersion in these species, and presumably therefore the gene flow, is inversely correlated with the

number of geographical races they contain."

Silcock noted that *M. c. cinerascens,* which is "migratory throughout most, if not all, of its range" (Lanyon 1961), would tend to be a widely dispersing taxon. In support of this hypothesis, all specimens collected in the East and identified to subspecies have indeed been *cinerascens* (Weston 1946; Simon 1958; Newman 1959; Williams 1959; Baird 1962; Bohlen 1975).

Baird (1962), in a discussion of the Ash-throated Flycatcher that he collected on Block Island on September 15, 1960, surmised that the bird may have been carried there by hurricane *Donna,* which passed a few miles west of Block Island on September 12. He also suggested as an equally probable alternative explanation that this individual, like members of a number of species, flew north in the fall (Baird *et al,* 1959).

With reference to the straying of eastern birds to the West, a situation that might entail many of the same factors of disorientation as the eastward movement of western birds, Silcock (1975) quoted Able (1972), who stated,

> "If, as Guy McCaskie suggests, most of the eastern birds found on the Pacific coast are lost and have faulty orientation mechanisms, something alarming is happening in populations of insectivorous birds. The matter merits investigation because who, for example, knows what effect persistent pesticides (which accumulate in birds' brains) might have on their ability to orient properly?"

Although to my knowledge no tests have been conducted to evaluate the effects of pesticides on avian orientation, pesticide-induced disorientation should be particularly noticeable in birds that breed in heavily treated areas. Species of birds that breed in the Cotton Belt—an area extending from North Carolina south to northern Florida and west to southeastern California—might be particularly subject to pesticide-induced abnormalities because of the tremendous pesticide load applied annually to control insect pests on cotton. The Ash-throated Flycatcher breeds throughout the major southwestern cotton-growing area; therefore, analyses of tissues of Ash-throated Flycatchers collected in the East would help to determine whether these vagrants contain unusually high pesticide levels.

BEHAVIOR

THE HEIGHT AT WHICH most Ash-throated Flycatchers have been observed in the East is a matter that many observers have regarded as having sufficient significance to merit mention in their reports. With few exception, all eastern sightings have been of birds that remained within a few feet of the ground. The Ash-throated Flycatcher that I observed in Virginia perched within 2 m of the ground and flew low; the bird that I observed in Florida also perched within 2 m of the ground. Simon (1958) wrote that ". . . the flycatcher at Monkton [Maryland], frequented only the lowest branches of the trees scattered throughout and surrounding an open field. It was never observed higher than 6 feet." Stepinoff (1970) reported that the Ash-throated Flycatcher seen at Chincoteague, Virginia "... was on a low bush inches off the ground. When flushed, it always flew low and strongly, but always landed a short distance away and always in low vegetation." Bohlen's report (1975) mentioned that the bird seen in Illinois fed from low (6 feet) to moderately high (20 feet). Since no other report mentions an Ash-throated Flycatcher as having been observed higher than 2 m above the ground, the behavior of the Illinois bird seems to have been exceptional. A possible explanation for this behavior is that in cold or cool months, it is warmer near the ground than at greater heights, and insects are more active when warm than when cold; also, many fruits grow low to the ground (John P. Hubbard, *pers. comm.).* This low perching height in conjunction with the species' sedentary habits and cryptic coloration may result in numbers of Ash-throated Flycatchers being overlooked by field observers in the East.

IDENTIFICATION

UNIDENTIFIED *Myiarchus* flycatchers reported in recent years in the East may actually have been Ash-throated Flycatchers, especially those in late autumn and early winter. Vickery (1980) reported that two "suggestive *Myiarchus* sp." were reported in 1979 in Maine, one in Hampden November 30-December 1 and one on Mt. Desert Island December 8. He thought that the two birds might have been western strays. Finch (1976), after reporting sightings of Great Crested Flycatchers in late autumn in New England, advised field observers that, "Such late *Myiarchus* flycatchers deserve scrutiny." Moreover, Purrington (1976) wrote that the Wied's Crested [Brown-crested] Flycatcher *(Myiarchus tyrannulus)* has recently been seen in Louisiana much more frequently than its relative [the Ash-throated Flycatcher].

Hesitation by field observers to identify out-of-season *Myiarchus* flycatchers seen in the East is understandable. Dunn (1978) described the *Myiarchus* genus as.". . . a very difficult group to distinguish, demanding great caution and the careful consideration of a number of visual and vocal characteristics before a definite identification should be attempted." Peterson (1980) included an illustration of the head, neck, and breast of an Ash-throated Flycatcher in his revised Eastern Field Guide, but previous editions showed only the Great Crested Flycatcher. The illustration of the Ash-throated Flycatcher in Robbins *et al.* (1966) is correct in most respects but fails to show light areas on both mandibles and lemon wash on the underparts. The text accompanying the illustrations may confuse eastern observers because the Olivaceous [Dusky-capped] Flycatcher *(Myiarchus tuberculifer)* is said to differ from other members of the group in its habit of picking insects from foliage while it hovers but that

other *Myiarchus* species feed almost exclusively on flying insects. As mentioned earlier, most Ash-throated Flycatchers seen in the East also pick insects from foliage; however, most do so while perched.

Phillips and Lanyon (1970) published a key to the identification of *M. crinitus, M. tyrannulus*, and *M. cinerascens,* but the key relied mainly on the color pattern of the inner web of the rectrices for separation of *M. tyrranulus* from *M. cinerascens.* Such characteristics are of great value to bird banders but are of only marginal use to field observers.

During the past year I examined most specimens of the *Myiarchus* flycatchers in the U.S. National Museum collection. Every specimen of *M. cinerascens* has pale yellow on the belly and has mandibles that are dark brown, almost black, to the base. Furthermore, *M. cinerascens* was the only species with a very pale gray or even whitish throat and breast. All other species had grayish throats and breasts, the color of which contrasted strongly and abruptly with the lemon underparts.

A useful treatise on the field identification of North American *Myiarchus* flycatchers was written by Jon Dunn and appeared as a two-part article in the *Western Tanager.* Dunn (1978, 1979) presented an exhaustive comparison of characteristics useful in separating *M. cinerascens, M. crinitus, M. tuberculifer,* and *M. tyrannulus* in the field. For the purpose of this paper I have chosen to selectively disregard the valuable information he offers on separating the species from each other and to concentrate only on how to distinguish *M. cinerascens* from the other *Myiarchus* species. Because these species exhibit no appreciable sexual dimorphism, the morphological descriptions apply to both males and females.

VISUAL

Wied's Crested [Brown-crested] Flycatcher: The two racial groups of this species that extend into the United States will be treated here as one form. Dunn (1978) reported that this species ". . . is *substantially larger* than the Ash-throated Flycatcher, and more importantly, has a much *longer, . . . thicker . . . bill* ..." (Figure 2) and shows "... a somewhat *brighter shade of yellow* on the belly" [which, however, can be affected by molt or wear] (Figure 3). However, Lanyon's (1960, 1961) statistics show considerable overlap in bill, wing, and tail measurements between *M. cinerascens* males and *M. tyrannulus cooperi* females. Moreover, the somewhat brighter shade of yellow on the belly is only a relative characteristic. Therefore, I suggest that separation of this species from *M. cinerascens* be accomplished *only* by a combination of visual *and* morphological characteristics. Dunn (1978) stated that the Wied's Crested Flycatcher is ". . . somewhat secretive, preferring to remain in the tops of the cottonwoods," in contrast to the low perches preferred by the Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Great Crested Flycatcher: Dunn (1979) stated that the best field mark by which to separate this species from the Ash-throated Flycatcher is its "... *mousy gray breast* that contrasts sharply with a *bright yellow belly"* (Figure 4). The back is ". . . strongly washed with *olive-green* in contrast to . . . the Ash-throated, which exhibit[s] *brownish-gray* upperparts" (Figure 5). Moreover, the lower mandible of the Great Crested Flycatcher is distinctly light in color, whereas that of the Ash-throated Flycatcher is uniformly dark (Figure 6).

Olivaceous [Dusky-capped] Flycatcher: The best character by which to separate this species from all other *Myiarchus* flycatchers is ". . . the total *lack of rufous on the rectrices,* and only a trace on the flight feathers ..." (Dunn, 1979) (Figure 7).

VOCAL

THE DAWN SONGS of all North American members of the genus *Myiarchus* are species-specific and offer the easiest means of specific identification (Davis, 1962). However, such songs are given only by males on territory during the breeding season and are of no use in the identification of vagrants in the East (Lanyon, *pers. comm.).* Call notes, however, can be relied upon as means of specific identification.

Wied's Crested [Brown-crested] Flycatcher: The song of this species consists of a long series of identical sentences, each composed of two three-syllable phrases. *"Will-for you"* and *"THREE for you"* (Davis, 1962). The calls consist of isolated "huit" notes at regular intervals and a call composed of two parts: an introductory syllable derived from a single "hut" note, followed quickly by a phrase composed of two or three "huit" notes given in rapid succession (Lanyon, 1978).

Great Crested Flycatcher: **The** song of this species is composed of two parts: a low *"wheeyer",* a pause, then a high *"wheeyer"* over and over again (Davis, 1962). The call is a harsh ascending *"wheep"* (Robbins *et al.,* 1966).

Olivaceous [Dusky-capped] Flycatcher: In this species the song consists of a long series of sentences that are composed of either two or three different phrases— *"whip, weeo, wee hoo".* The last phrase is quite different from the others (Davis, 1962). The call is a plaintive, gently slurred whistle that varies in length from 0.4 to 1.0 second (Lanyon, 1978).

Ash-throated Flycatcher: The song of this species consists of a series of two-syllable phrases repeated rhythmically. The first syllable is a *"wit";* the second is a note inflected up, then down (Davis, 1962). The call consists of short, sharp notes (Robbins *et al.,* 1966) or a *"pwit"* (Peterson, 1961).

In view of the relative difficulty encountered in identifying juvenile or weathered individuals in the field, especially when they are silent, as are

most flycatchers in autumn in North America, it becomes apparent that extralimital *Myiarchus* flycatchers should be properly documented whenever possible. The age and sex should be carefully determined and the colors of the mouth and other "soft parts" recorded. When collection is undesirable, the birds should at least be netted so that the morphological characteristics given in Phillips and Lanyon (1970) can be evaluated, and the rectrix pattern should be photographed.

SUMMARY

THE Ash-throated Flycatcher *(Myiarchus cinerascens),* once considered to be an accidental visitor east of the Mississippi River, has become a regular fall and occasional spring visitor in recent years. This species can be separated in the field from other North American species of *Myiarchus* flycatchers by a combination of visual and vocal characteristics. However, extralimital individuals should be carefully observed and fully documented, photographed, or at least netted and the rectrix pattern photographed or otherwise verified.

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Figure 2. *Relative sizes of bodies and bills of Wied's Crested (top) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers.*

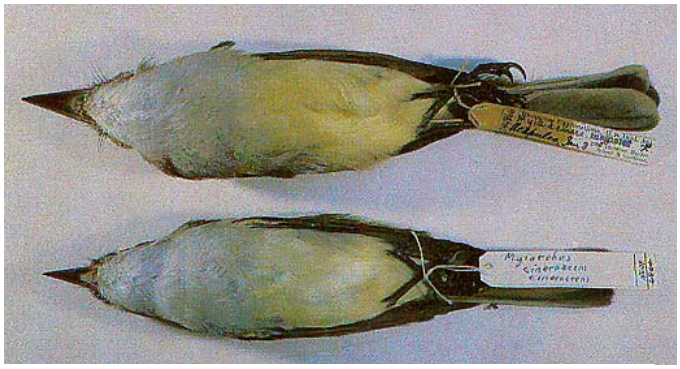

Figure 3. *Relative hues of yellow on bellies of Wied's Crested (top) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers. Also note relative widths of bills.*

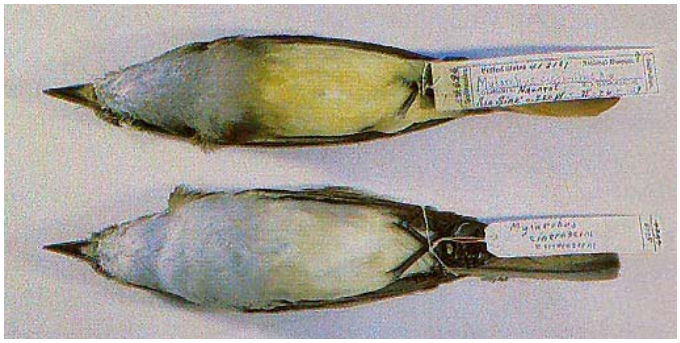

Figure 4. *Relative contrast between breasts and bellies of Great Crested (top) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers.*

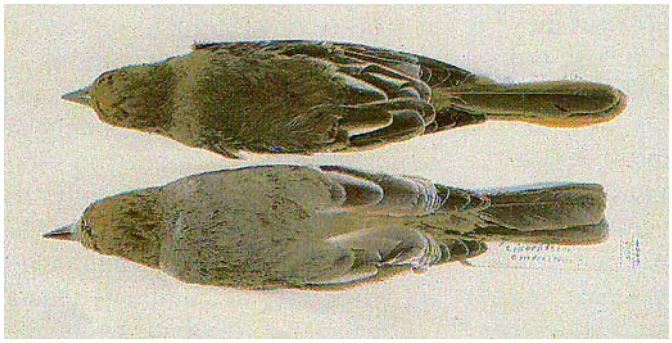

Figure 5. *Comparison of back colors of Great Crested (lop) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers.*

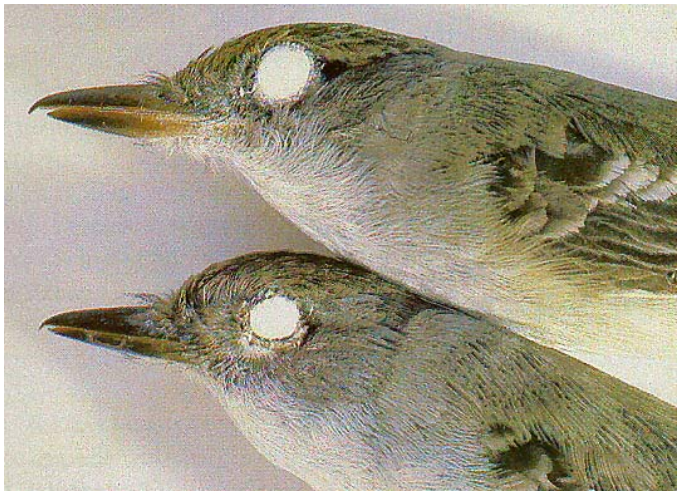

Figure 6. *Comparison of bill color of Great Crested (top) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers).*

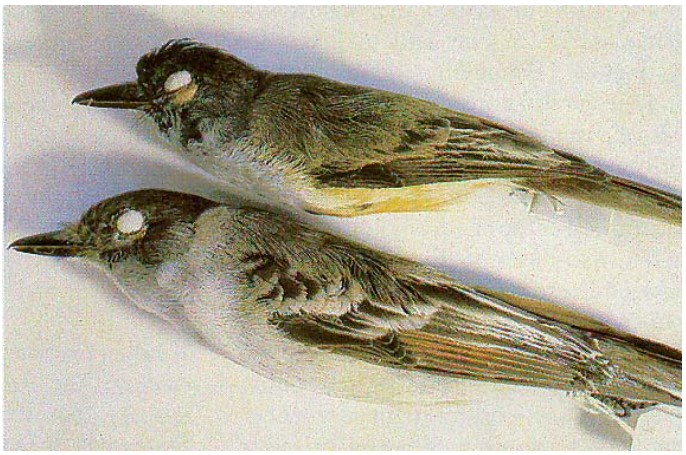

Figure 7. *Comparison of the amount of rufous in the rectrices and of the relative body sizes of Olivaceous (top) and Ash-throated (bottom) Flycatchers.*