

A Sight Record of Dusky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Dusky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) is a shy and secretive passerine that is found breeding in low sparse taiga, scrub and bushes near swamp or edges in lowlands, or thickets on slopes; across Siberia from the Ob River northeast to the southern Chukotka Peninsula, south through Koryakia, Kamchatka Peninsula, the Southern Russian Far East, Ussuriland and Sakhalin Island, northeastern China, North Korea, west to Mongolia, and the eastern Himalayas (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Brazil 2009). This Dusky Warbler is highly migratory, but skulky in nature, and is found during both migration and in the winter months in dense vegetation, where this species is active and vocal, favouring reeds or tall grasses with some low trees near streams and ditches, rivers and ponds (Brazil 2009). This species is a scarce migrant in South Korea and Japan (Brazil 2009). The Dusky Warbler winters from coastal southeastern China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Northern Malaysia, Burma, Bangladesh and parts of northeastern India (Brazil 2009). The Dusky Warbler is a scarce winter visitor to Japan (Brazil 2009).

In North America, the Dusky Warbler is a casual species, particularly in the fall, with records scattered from all over the state including Attu Island, Shemya Island, St. Paul Island, and Gambel with at least 11 fall records and 1 spring record (West 2008). There is also a record from aboard a ship in the central Bering Sea and single fall record from Middleton Island (West 2008).

Along the west coast of North America, south of Alaska, the Dusky Warbler is an accidental vagrant species with a handful of records. There is a good single sight fall record of Dusky Warbler for British Columbia from Haida Gwaii (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). There are no accepted records of the Dusky Warbler for Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016) and Oregon State (OFO 2016). There are 14 accepted records for California by the California Bird Records Committee, with 2 records from the end of September, and 12 records coming from the month of October (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017). There are 2 records for Mexico with the first, a sight record, from Maneadero Plain on October 15, 1991, and a photographed bird from Catavina from October 20-23, 1995 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

The Dusky Warbler is rare fall vagrant in Europe with most records occurring from late September to early November, with the peak of records occurring during the month of October (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Vinicombe and Cottridge 1996). This species is an accidental late fall vagrant to Morocco (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Dusky Warbler is covered in most standard North American Field Guides. This species is medium in size measuring 10-13 cm in length, with a wingspan of 19.05 cm, and weighs 8.5-13.5 grams (Sibley 2000, Brazil 2009). This makes the Dusky Warbler a little bigger than an Orange-crowned Warbler (*Oreothlypis celata*) which measures 12 cm in length, with a wingspan of 18 cm, and weighs 9 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In the context of British Columbia, the Dusky Warbler is not very similar looking to any regularly occurring species found in the province and should be obvious to any keen observer. The most likely similar looking species to turn up in the province that could cause confusion with the Dusky Warbler is the Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*) which breeds in from continental Eurasia and Alaska and has also occurred along the west coast in California as a vagrant (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The Arctic Warbler was recently split into 3 species and it is not clear if some California records also refer to Kamchatka Leaf-Warbler (*Phylloscopus examinandus*) which breeds from the Kamchatka Peninsula, Sakhalin Island and Hokkaido in Japan and could be a potential vagrant in North America (Alstrom *et al.* 2011). It is recommended that keen observers read Lewington *et al.* (1992) or Mullarney and Zetterstrom (2007) for detailed information on how to separate the Dusky Warbler from other Old World Warbler species. The Dusky Warbler is a rather drab species that likes to flick its wings and tail constantly (Brazil 2009).

Adult and immature birds look the same and are best ages in the hand (Bradshaw 1991). Dusky Warblers in general are a drab looking species lacking any green tones, with small head, with a thin, almost fine black bill, and a short tail (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009). Upperparts are dark greyish-brown (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The base of the bill to behind the dark brown eye is a clear dark eye stripe that is dark (Brazil 2009). Above this line is a narrow supercilium that is white from the base of the bill to the eye and is buff to off-white behind the eye (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). There is a distinct light eye arc below the eye (Sibley 2000). The wings are rather short, with a short primary projection and the tail is quite long (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009). The chin and throat is off-white (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009). The breast and flanks are gray-white, with the rear flanks and vent a warm buff-brown wash (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009). The thin legs and small feet are brownish-pink to orange-brown (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Brazil 2009).

The calls are a hard dry, somewhat muffled “tak tak tak”, “tchak”, “chett” or “chack”, or a slightly wetter “chett-chett”, that is often repeated rapidly (Brazil 2009). The call notes resemble the “stak” note given by a Lincoln’s Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolnii*), but drier in sound (Sibley 2000).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Dusky Warbler is an accidental vagrant in British Columbia and is represented by well documented sight record by Peter Hamel who found the bird at Sandspit, in Haida Gwaii on September 10, 2003 (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The bird was present with 6 Chestnut-backed Chickadees (*Poecile rufescens*), 3 or 4 Golden-crowned Kinglets (*Regulus satrapa*), 5 Orange-crowned Warblers (*Oreothlypis celata*) and 20+ Townsend's Warblers (*Setophaga townsendi*) (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This was in a strip of Western Red Alder Trees (*Alnus rubra*) and Salmonberry canes (*Rubus spectabilis*) (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). Detailed field notes were taken at the time giving a good description of the bird's appearance and behavior as well as the call notes (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). Unfortunately due to the shy nature of the bird, photographs were not obtained and further attempts to relocate this bird were unsuccessful (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The timing of this Sandspit record is on the early side of the overall occurrence of Dusky Warbler along the West Coast south of Alaska, but isn't unreasonable. The date range of California's 14 accepted records fall between the dates September 27 – November 3 with most records having been found at or near the west coast (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017). In Alaska the timing of records is earlier and the dates of Dusky Warbler records in the fall span from the dates August 21 – September 23 (Gibson and Kessel 1992, Lehman 2005). The latitude of Haida Gwaii falls between 51 -53 ° N and lines up well with the same latitude as the Aleutian Islands which falls between 51 – 55 ° N (Google Maps). A Dusky Warbler found in early to mid-September falls in the perfectly into migration time period for when this species would be expected in that part of Alaska. It is well recorded that Haida Gwaii is on the flight path that birds take from Alaska to California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The birds that travel to North America from the Far East Asia are believed to take this journey as a result of a mirror migration where the bird travels the correct migration distance, but in the opposite direction of the route it should have taken (Howell *et al.* 2014). The result of this incorrect route is likely how birds end up travelling through Alaska, down the west coast and up in California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Howell 2011). Given the increasing number of Dusky Warbler records in California since the first record was banded and photographed on the Southeast Farallon Islands on September 27, 1980 (Pyle *et al.* 1983). It is logical that future records will occur along the west coast and keen observers should watch for this species in important west coast vagrant trap and banding locations.

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