

The First Record of Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*) is a widespread passerine species found breeding in eastern North America in forest clearings and edges (Murray 1969). This species breeds in virtually every type of wooded community in eastern North America, including both deciduous and coniferous forest which is more common in the southern part of its breeding range (Kendeigh 1944b, Kendeigh 1948, Johnston and Odum 1956, Bond 1957b, Hespenheide 1971, Peck and James 1987, Post and Gauthreaux, Jr. 1989, Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The Eastern Wood-Pewee is also found breeding throughout central and eastern North America from southeastern Saskatchewan (Smith 1996b), southern Manitoba (Godfrey 1986), southern Ontario (Cadman *et al.* 1987, Peck and James 1987, Cadman *et al.* 2007a), southern Quebec (Cyr and Larivee 1995a), New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia including Cape Breton Island (Squires 1976, Tufts 1986, Erskine 1992a, American Ornithologists' Union 1998, Stewart *et al.* 2015), south along the Atlantic Coast (Adamus 1987, Post and Gauthreaux, Jr. 1989, Veit and Petersen 1993, Bevier 1994d, Hess *et al.* 2000, Schneider *et al.* 2010, Renfrew 2013) to northern Florida (Robertson, Jr., and Woolfenden 1992, Stevenson and Anderson 1994), the Gulf Coast and southeastern Texas (Oberholser 1974, Imhof 1976, Rappole and Blacklock 1985, Turcotte and Watts 1999, Benson and Arnold 2001), and west to central North Dakota (Stewart 1975, Johnsgard 1979), central South Dakota (Tallman *et al.* 2002), eastern Nebraska (Johnsgard 1979, Ducey 1988), central Kansas (Johnsgard 1979, Rising and Schueler 1980, Busby and Zimmerman 2001, Thompson *et al.* 2011), central Oklahoma (Wood and Schnell 1984, Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992) with some confirmed breeding records in southwestern Oklahoma (Reinking 2004) and eastern Texas extending westward into portions of the Edwards plateau of south-central Texas (Oberholser 1974, Pulich 1988b, Benson and Arnold 2001). This species has been found in the breeding season in the Texas panhandle (Oberholser 1974), but there are no confirmed breeding records (Seyffert 2001).

The Eastern Wood-Pewee is a long-distance Nearctic–Neotropical migrant moving annually between its breeding range in North America to its overwintering range in northwestern South America (Watt *et al.* 2017). Unlike most other eastern North American tyrant-flycatchers that cross the Gulf of Mexico to overwintering grounds in South America (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2004), the Eastern Wood-Pewee is more likely to pass through eastern Mexico than to cross the Gulf (American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

The Eastern Wood-Pewee winters primarily in northern South America from northwestern Colombia and northeastern Venezuela (De Schauensee and Phelps 1978, Hilty and Brown 1986, Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990, Ridgely and Tudor 1994, Restall *et al.* 2006) south to southern Peru, northern Bolivia, and Amazonian Brazil (Fitzpatrick 1980b, Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990, Sick 1993, Ridgely and Tudor 1994). This species is found as far west as coastal Colombia and the Andes in Ecuador and Peru (Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990, Ridgely and Tudor 1994). The Eastern Wood-Pewee has been recorded as an uncommon to locally common transient and overwintering resident in the lowlands and foothills of both eastern and western Ecuador from October–May (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001). This species is a locally common migrant and overwintering resident, recorded from September 13–April 23 in Venezuela (Hilty 2002). The Eastern Wood-Pewee is a fairly common species from September–April on the east slopes of the Andes below 1,400 m and to Amazonia in Peru (Schulenberg *et al.* 2007). The distribution of this species throughout Colombia is listed as common in middle elevation forest clearings (Munves 1975). The eastern winter range limit of the Eastern Wood-Pewee is uncertain in Brazil, but there are skin specimens that have been collected from as far west as Manaus in Brazil and there are undocumented records from French Guiana (Stotz *et al.* 1992, Tostain *et al.* 1992, Ridgely and Tudor 1994). The overall winter range of the Eastern Wood-Pewee in Brazil is shown as western Amazonia with a few scattered locations in other parts of the country (van Perlo 2009).

The overwintering distribution of the Eastern Wood-Pewee in Central America is generally given as patchy (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989, Watt *et al.* 2017). This species is recorded as rare (Stiles and Skutch 1989) to uncommon (Slud 1964) overwintering resident in Costa Rica.

The Eastern Wood-Pewee is seldom reported outside of its normal range (Watt *et al.* 2017). This species is a casual vagrant in states bordering its breeding range in the western United States (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Andrews and Righter 1992). The Eastern Wood-Pewee is a casual or accidental vagrant off Labrador (320 km at sea), Newfoundland, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Bermuda and Barbados (American Ornithologists' Union 1998).

Along the west coast of North America the only accepted records of the Eastern Wood-Pewee involve birds that were photographed and vocalizations were heard and in most cases were recorded (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). To date there are very few records of the Eastern Wood-Pewee from western North America which is due to its overall similarity to the Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There is 1 accepted record for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee of a bird that was both recorded and photographed in Lind Coulee, in Grant County that returned 3 years in a row from August 21-31, 2013; July 30 - August 17, 2014; July 30 - August 19, 2015 (WRBC 2018). There are 2 accepted records for Oregon by the Oregon Bird Records Committee involving singing birds,

both were found at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge with the first found in August 1953 and the second was photographed from May 28-30, 1994 (OFO 2016). There are 14 accepted records of the Eastern Wood-Pewee for California by the California Bird Records Committee that span the months of June to early November, with some birds being banded and documented at banding stations (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2018). There are no records for Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2019). This is a recent addition to the avifauna of British Columbia with a fall bird that was well photographed and was heard vocalizing in the Deroche area of the Upper Fraser Valley in September 2018 (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Eastern Wood-Pewee is covered in all standard North American field guides. This is a medium sized passerine measuring 16 cm in length, with a wingspan of 25.4 cm, and weighing 14 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Adult Eastern Wood-Pewees are grayish-olive above and pale below with a slightly darker wash on the breast and sides, and have whitish wing-bars (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Watt *et al.* 2017). The upper mandible is dark; the lower mandible is pale-orange with a dark tip (Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Watt *et al.* 2017). The sexes are similar in appearance (Watt *et al.* 2017). Juvenile birds are darker with yellower underparts (Watt *et al.* 2017). This species sits in an upright position typical of flycatchers, but often has tail held down below the extension of the primaries and back giving it a curved profile (Lee *et al.* 2008). It is important to note that the Western Wood-Pewee sits with a more vertical and straighter back-to-tail profile, giving birds a straight angular posture (Lee *et al.* 2008). This field mark is very useful when looking at photographs of potential vagrants (Lee *et al.* 2008). Like other flycatcher species the Eastern Wood-Pewee hawks for flying insects, but does not flick wings or wag its tail (Watt *et al.* 2017).

The difficulty in identification is separating this species from its sibling species, the Western Wood-Pewee which measures 16 cm in length, a wingspan of 26.67 cm, and weighs 13 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011) and is a common breeding species throughout British Columbia (Campbell *et al.* 1997). By far the best way to distinguish the 2 species is by song (Lee *et al.* 2008). The Eastern Wood-Pewee gives a clear “*pee-ah-wee*” song that is very distinct from the harsh, buzzy, “*peer*” of the Western Wood-Pewee (Watt *et al.* 2017). The non-breeding call note of the Eastern Wood-Pewee is a high, strongly up slurred whistle versus the slightly lower-pitched and nearly monotone call of the Western Wood-Pewee (Sibley 2019). Both migrant birds and wintering birds of both species often give clear whistled notes (Sibley 2019). The Eastern Wood-Pewee consistently gives a strongly up-slurred 2-part sounding “*tu-eee*” call while the Western Wood-Pewee gives a slightly lower and flat single sounding “*tee*” call, often ending with a more or less obvious burry quality (Sibley 2019).

Some plumage characters may differ between the species, but because there is some overlap, they are not reliable alone for separating the species (Rising and Schueler 1980, Dunn and Garrett 1983, Kaufman 1990a). In general, the upperparts are paler and may be tinged with green in the Eastern Wood-Pewee; the colour of the chest and sides is darker and browner in the Western Wood-Pewee, which, unlike the Eastern Wood-Pewee, typically shows dusky colour extending down the sides to flanks (Watt *et al.* 2017). The chest band of the Eastern Wood-Pewee may be tinged with green and this is never the case with Western Wood-Pewee (Watt *et al.* 2017). The lower mandible of the adult Eastern Wood-Pewee is less dark than that of the Western Wood-Pewee; the dark colour may be more extensive in the Western Wood-Pewee (Watt *et al.* 2017). Separation is complicated if juvenile Eastern Wood-Pewees are present, which are generally darker below than adults and have dark bills more similar to the Western Wood-Pewee (Watt *et al.* 2017).

Analyses of wing and tail morphology based on museum specimens (Pyle 1997a, Hubbard 2002) provide details for identification of birds in the hand. The Eastern Wood-Pewee averages a slightly longer-tailed and shorter-winged appearance than the Western Wood-Pewee (Sibley 2019). Pyle (1997) reports that a formula using tail projection (tip of tail to tip of longest uppertail covert) minus primary projection (tip of longest primary to tip of longest secondary) identifies about 97.5% of all specimens regardless of age, sex, or season. Lee *et al.* (2008) shows from photographs that the primary extension is shorter to the tail tip on Eastern Wood-Pewee and equal on Western Wood-Pewees. For analysis and photographs showing how to use the wing to tail measurement formula it is highly recommended that keen observers read Pyle 1997, Pyle 1997a, Hubbard 2002, and Lee *et al.* (2008).

Other subtle indicators in posture can be useful in identification such as Western Wood-Pewee is a bird that perches at an angle where the tail is more in line with the body giving the wings and tail the appearance of looking virtually straight, like a ruler (Lee *et al.* 2008, Sibley 2019). Analysis of photographs of the Eastern Wood-Pewee show that this species does not sit as straight and will hold the tail downward giving the bird a more curved appearance (Lee *et al.* 2008). A good summarization in Lee *et al.* (2008) gives the following field marks as important in aiding in the identification of both species of Wood-Pewees (these are listed in order of importance): vocalizations, the ratio of primary extension to tail extension, posture and tail angle, contrast between upper and lower wing bars, lower mandible colouration, and overall colouration of underparts and upper parts. It is important to stress that subtle features alone will not identify an apparent vagrant Eastern Wood-Pewee, but together these indicators will help in alerting an individual of a potential vagrant pewee (Lee *et al.* 2008). The best manner for certainty of identification is vocalizations and excellent photographs showing the wing and tail

ratio (Lee *et al.* 2008). For more information on identification, it highly recommended that keen observers read Bemis and Rising (1999) and Lee *et al.* (2008).

Eastern Wood-Pewee is generally distinguished from other "*Empidonax*" flycatchers by its larger size, dark face, weak eye-ring, and longer and more pointed wings, which extend at least halfway down the tail when perched (Phillips *et al.* 1966a, Pyle 1997). The species is distinguished from the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) by its smaller size, distinctive wing-bars, pale lower mandible, and lack of tail-wagging behaviour. The Eastern Wood-Pewee differs from the Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus borealis*), by its smaller size, dusky (not dark) flanks, proportionately smaller head and bill, and by vocalizations (Altman and Sallabanks 2012).

Any records of the Eastern Wood-Pewee in British Columbia need to be photographed at length and hopefully from every angle. It is also imperative that any potential birds are heard vocalizing and whenever possible songs and call notes are recorded.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Eastern Wood-Pewee is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with a well photographed and heard immature bird found by Rick Toochin, Paul and David Baker on private property in the Deroche area of the Upper Fraser Valley on September 3, 2018 (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). The bird was found and photographed in the company of 3 Western Wood-Pewees, 2 adults and 1 immature (D. Baker Pers. Comm.). The Eastern Wood-Pewee responded to call playback and gave both call notes and sang back to recordings (P. Baker Pers. Comm.). When Western Wood-Pewee recordings were also played in the same area, this bird ignored them, but the 3 Western Wood-Pewees responded almost immediately (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). The bird did not vocalize often and unfortunately despite attempts to secure recordings of the song, we were unsuccessful (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). Fortunately all observers were able to obtain hundreds of photographs from every angle that clearly show the angled manner the bird sat, the bright buffy wingbars, the overall greenish colouration on the bird's plumage, and the short primary extension to the overall tail length. This bird also sat constantly with its tail angled downward from the bird's body and folded wings (D. Baker Pers. Comm.). This represents the first provincial record of this species for British Columbia.



Figure #1: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This bird almost always sat with its tail pointed down away from its body and folded wings. Photo © Rick Toochin.



Figure #2: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This bird almost always sat with its tail pointed down away from its body and folded wings. Photo © Rick Toochn.



Figure #3: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This bird almost always sat with its tail pointed down away from its body and folded wings. Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #4: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018.
This bird almost always sat with its tail pointed down away from its body and folded wings.
Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #5: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018.
The bird listened intently as the song and calls of the Eastern Wood-Pewee were played to it before responding.
Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #6: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This shot captured the bird responding to the song of the Eastern Wood-Pewee. Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #7: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This photo clearly shows the primary extension is shorter than the tail extension. Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #7a: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. This photo clearly shows the primary extension is shorter than the tail extension. Photo © Paul Baker.



Figure #8: Record #1: Eastern Wood-Pewee in the Deroche Area on September 3, 2018. The tail in this photo is spread showing pointed tail feathers indicating a juvenile bird. Photo © Paul Baker.

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