

# White-eyed Vireo: New to Northern Ontario

by  
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Knowing that the White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) is usually restricted to the extreme southern portions of Ontario, I was very surprised to locate an individual of this species on 13 October 1986 at Marathon, Thunder Bay District.

The bird was found at about 1200h beside the railway line running south of town along the shore of Lake Superior. The habitat here is mixed white spruce (*Picea glauca*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), poplar (*Populus* sp.), alder (*Alnus* sp.) and red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*); overall it is predominantly deciduous. On the day of observation, there was considerable snow on the ground in all inland areas and high ground but, near the lake, snow was absent and birds were numerous. During the observation it was overcast with little wind.

The bird was found when I stepped off the tracks to investigate a small band of American Tree Sparrows (*Spizella arborea*) and Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) feeding along the forest edge. When I "spished," a small, brightly-coloured bird popped up into a leafless alder bush about 6 m away. It proved to be a White-eyed Vireo. The bird fed in the

open for a minute or so at (or below) eye level before proceeding to feed much higher in a leafless birch. Here I noticed it was feeding with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*). Both birds disappeared and I started to take field notes, but after a few minutes I wanted to see the bird again to check on some fine points of the bird's plumage. I entered the forest and again found the bird. This time it was foraging quietly in some mostly leafless red-osier Dogwood at a distance of about 7 m, often feeding close to the ground. After a few more minutes of observation, I left the area.

This White-eyed Vireo is the first to be recorded in northern Ontario. The species is not listed for the region by Wormington and James (1984), and subsequent annual reports of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (for the years 1983 to 1985 inclusive) do not report the species.

## Description

For a vireo, the bird was somewhat smallish, probably not much larger than a Bay-breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*), with a proportionately shorter tail. Compared to the adjacent Ruby-crowned Kinglet, it was obviously larger, but not overly so. It was

Alan Wormington, R.R. #1, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V4

small-headed in comparison to other vireos—such as Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*), one of which was seen about an hour earlier. The bird sometimes held its tail slightly cocked (horizontal with the ground) while at the same time holding its wings in a drooping fashion. When feeding high in a tree with the Ruby-crowned Kinglet it flitted about in kinglet fashion with some apparent wing-flicking.

The bill was slate grey, unmarked, and typically vireo-shaped with a blunt-tipped look. The eyes were black or dark and stood out against the brightness of the surrounding spectacles. The eye rings were bright yellow and were the brightest part of the bird; the upper portions continued to the base of the bill to complete each of the spectacles. The rest of the head (above the eyes) was an unmarked, smooth-looking light drab grey; the head colour was unlike the dark blue-grey of a Solitary Vireo. There was no appearance of a cap or frontal plate. The back was a bright grassy-green and was otherwise unmarked. Wings were greenish like the back, but were darker due to dark (grey) feather edging; each wing feather was tipped (edged) with pale yellow to create a pattern along the top of the folded wing. On each wing were two wingbars, both very narrow but very bright white with a yellow tinge. The tail above was dark greenish, with the feathers (apparently the tips) edged in dark grey. The throat was pale grey (whitest in the middle and overall lighter than the head), with the sides slightly yellowish. The

belly of the bird was bright lemon yellow, lighter (and largely whitish) running down the centre; the colour was unlike the dark, "streaky" yellow typical of Solitary Vireo. The undertail coverts were whitish with a slight yellowish tint.

The bird was clearly a young-of-the-year, based on the dark-coloured eyes easily observed at close range.

### **Status North of the Breeding Range**

The White-eyed Vireo is a southern species, nesting north to southern Massachusetts, southern New York, extreme southern Ontario, southern Michigan, central Wisconsin, central Iowa and eastern Nebraska (A.O.U. 1983:589-590).

A quick analysis of extralimital records (north of the breeding range) disclose distinctive patterns. In spring, the species is a regular, often numerous, "over-shooting" migrant to areas just beyond the normal breeding range, particularly those immediately bordering the southern Great Lakes. For example, an exceptional 150 or more birds were recorded during the spring of 1982 at Point Pelee, Essex Co., Ontario (Wormington 1982), where only a few pairs regularly nest. Fall records, however, are far fewer overall (in comparison to spring) but birds are as likely—or more likely—to be found well away from the breeding range. Finally, there are several "summer" records north of the breeding range, which perhaps refer to non-breeding birds.

In the general area of the Great Lakes the most extralimital records

include three spring and two fall records for the Ottawa area (Bruce M. Di Labio, pers. comm., 1986); a 22 September 1978 observation on Great Duck Island, Manitoulin District (Nicholson 1981:156); and two northern Michigan records, one on 11 May 1979 at North Manitou Island, Leelanau Co., and the other on 10–11 May 1979 at Whitefish Point, Chippewa Co. (Payne 1983:45).

In Minnesota, where the species is very rare, all eight to ten records are for the southern half of the state; most of these were recorded in spring or early summer (Kim R. Eckert, pers. comm., 1986), with the only fall record on 21 October 1980 (Christman 1981). Of six records located for Nova Scotia (Tufts 1962:356; Godfrey 1986:454), five were in fall, while only one pertained to spring. Another occurrence of note, representing the only Manitoba record, concerns a bird observed on 3–4 July 1981 at Winnipeg by G. Holland *et al.* (Koes 1985).

In summary, the Marathon individual occurred at a time of year (*i.e.*, during fall migration) when birds well away from the breeding range are typically recorded. Furthermore, it provides yet another example of a southern species which has occurred in northern Ontario only as a fall migrant, and on a comparatively late date for the species generally. (Details of a similar record in northern Ontario involving an Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) are presented elsewhere in this issue of *Ontario Birds*.)

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