

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Long-time subscribers to *Bird Observer* are very familiar with Barry Van Dusen's work. Barry continues to garner international acclaim for his artistry. Recently he was elected as a full member to the international Society for Wildlife Artists. Barry will be doing a one-man exhibition at the New England Wildflower Society, Garden in the Woods, in Framingham, Massachusetts, from June 3-June 30, 1996. Barry can also be reached at 13 Radford Road, Princeton, Massachusetts 01541.

AT A GLANCE *April 1996* _____ *Wayne R. Petersen*

This month's mystery species is a tough one. The first challenge is to place the bird into the correct family. A quick inspection might suggest that the bird is some species of flycatcher, wood-warbler, vireo, or possibly even an oriole, except that the nest is all wrong for an oriole. How about a Pine Warbler? The bird has a smooth unstreaked back, white wing bars, and the appearance of some white around the eye, all features that fit a Pine Warbler. However, the rather long bill appears to have a slight hook at the tip (not a wood-warbler feature); it does not show any trace of white spots in the tail (although these could be concealed); and there appears to be an excessive amount of pale edging to the folded tertials and secondaries for any of the Massachusetts wood-warblers. But perhaps most importantly, the bird's nest is not saddled into a dense tuft of pine needles, a characteristic practically as reliable for Pine Warblers as any plumage feature.

Although a few other wood-warblers may look somewhat similar to the pictured bird, only the Cerulean Warbler shares the combination of wing bars and unstreaked back shown in the photograph. However, the Cerulean Warbler has a prominent eyebrow stripe and would appear smaller and more compact. It also builds a neat cup nest, very unlike the sloppily constructed nest shown in the photograph.

The vireo species having wing bars can variously be eliminated because of their thicker bill shape, different head pattern (i.e., spectacles or eye rings), and iris color. Also, vireo nests tend to be neat cups saddled in a fork and trimmed with lichens, moss, and spider webs. They tend to be tidy, not messy like the pictured nest.

We are left with flycatchers as a possible family for the mystery bird.

Again, a knowledge of nest type can be useful. Eastern Wood-Pewees characteristically saddle their nests on branches; other larger flycatchers look sufficiently different not to pose a problem. This leaves only the Empidonx flycatchers as possibilities.

If by now you have gone to the nest guide, good for you. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher usually nests on the ground, while the Least Flycatcher typically puts its cup nest in a tree crotch. This leaves only the Willow, Alder, and Acadian flycatchers as choices.

In most cases, neither Willow nor Alder flycatchers show much of an eye ring, a feature the pictured bird clearly possesses. Furthermore, these two very similar species frequently do not have wing bars as pronounced as in some other empids. And most importantly they tend to build their nests in a crotch of a bush or low shrub.

We have reduced the possibilities to Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*). The pictured bird clearly has a distinct eye ring, noticeably long primaries that extend well below the tips of the folded secondaries and tertials, a long bill for a small flycatcher, and a rather broad tail. But regardless of how difficult these features may be to decipher, the sloppy nest construction, with long roots and grasses trailing off the bottom, and the nest location, which is in a horizontal fork, are quintessential Acadian Flycatcher characteristics.

A steadily colonizing species from the south, the Acadian Flycatcher is increasingly frequent as a late spring migrant and breeding bird in a number of scattered locations across Massachusetts.



Acadian Flycatcher

Photo by Hugo H. Schroder. Courtesy of MAS.

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Hal H. Harrison. Courtesy of MAS.



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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