

NOTES

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**FIRST FLORIDA RECORD OF VARIEGATED FLYCATCHER
(*EMPIDONOMUS VARIUS*) AT GARDEN KEY, DRY TORTUGAS**

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The Variegated Flycatcher occurs throughout most of South America east of the Andes (AOU 1983). This species migrates northward between September and February after breeding in the middle and southern part of the continent. The species winters in the Guianas, northern Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and eastern Peru, after typically arriving in March (Zimmer 1938). In this note I describe observations of a Variegated Flycatcher in Florida, representing the first record in Florida and only the third in the United States.

At 1030 on 15 March 1991 on Garden Key, Dry Tortugas, Monroe County, I found an unusual flycatcher perched at the top of a gumbo limbo (*Bursera simaruba*). For the next four hours, I studied, photographed (Fig. 1), and took notes on the behavior and plumage of this bird under a variety of lighting conditions and from distances as close as 3 m. I showed park rangers Mat Fagan and Al Brown the flycatcher through my 20x Bushnell Spacemaster scope and 7x Nikon binocular. The weather was partly cloudy with periods of bright sunshine, with a light breeze and temperatures near 21° C.

In typical flycatcher manner, this bird often perched erect in the top of a tree at the tip of a branch. This flycatcher was somewhat skittish. When rangers and visitors walked close by, it would fly to another tree 5-10 meters away. It was observed eating fruit from the gumbo limbo by perching on a branch and reaching the fruit without flying. In one 10-15 minute period, I observed it eat about 15 berries and then fly to perch at the top of another tree where it regurgitated what appeared to be large seeds. I did not see it sally forth after insects. The bird made no sound that I could detect.

This bird was midway in size between a Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) and a Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), both of which were observed in the same tree. The bill was all black and short and less than half the size of the head. The inside of mouth was yellow. The crown was olive, streaked with blackish, and showed a yellow center stripe. The dark olive gray line through the eye extended to the nape, and the width of this line did not quite extend to top of the eye but extended below the eye by a distance about equal to the width of the eye. The eye was dark. The white line above the eye began above the bill and extended to the nape and came close to joining its counterpart from the other side. There was white on the face below the dark eye line. The malar streak was olive gray. The chin and throat were white without streaking. The breast was white with broad olive gray streaks. One or two breast feathers were loose and barely attached to the bird. The belly and under tail coverts were yellowish with no streaking. The legs were black.

The back, rump, and wings were an olive gray that was lighter than the crown but darker than the tail. The back and rump pattern looked scalloped due to the lighter edges of the feathers. The wing feathers were edged distinctly white with two thin white wing



Figure 1. Variegated Flycatcher photographed on Garden Key.

bars. The intermost secondary was more broadly edged with white than the others. The shoulder (lesser wing covert) feathers were edged with rufous brown. From above, the tail was lighter olive gray than the back or wings. The tail feathers had distinct, thin rufous edges with outer tail feathers edged buffy toward the tip, and the tip of the tail was buffy. The upper tail coverts extended about a third of the length of the tail and were more broadly edged with rufous. The tail was slightly notched. There was no sign of wear on the tail or wing feathers.

The bird was identified as a Variegated Flycatcher, based on its size, bill length, white unstreaked throat, yellow crown patch in a dark crown, white edges on wing feathers and double wing bars, and rufous outer edges of upper tail coverts and upper tail, and yellowish belly and under tail coverts. Similar species include Sulfur-bellied (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*) and Streaked Flycatchers (*Myiodynastes maculatus*), but they are larger birds with heavy, long bills, have less contrast between the dark crown and the white stripe above the eye, and the latter has streaking on the throat. The Piratic Flycatcher (*Legatus leucophaeus*) has a back that is uniform and darker brown, the rump and tail have virtually no rufous edging, and wing coverts and inner remiges are vaguely pale edged (Hilty and Brown 1986). John W. Fitzpatrick (pers. comm.) compared the photographs of this bird to

specimens, and provided the following information: "The diagnostic feature is the conspicuous, well-developed yellow coronal patch, mostly concealed by a nearly solid, dark crown. This identifies the bird at Garden Key as a full adult. Juvenile *Legatus* (and young *Empidonomus*) lack this patch, having a scaly crown instead. Because it is an adult, only *Empidonomus* could show as much rufous on the upper tail coverts and rectrices. Those of adult *Legatus* are dark, dusky brown more or less matching the wings and back. However, juveniles of this, and all other Tyrannine species are conspicuously rufous in both areas. In addition, *Legatus* adults do have a slightly darker and much more uniform back compared to *Empidonomus*, which is more scaly looking."

The Piratic Flycatcher has not been recorded north of Mexico, but it is migratory and occurs much closer to the United States than the Variegated. Thus observers of rare streaked flycatchers in the U.S. should be aware of the possibility of either the Variegated or Piratic, and recognize the difficulty of separating them in the field.

Garden Key is far north of the Variegated Flycatcher's normal wintering grounds, but finding one there in March may mean that the bird flew past its target on its northern migration. It is about 1,500 kilometers from Barranquilla, Colombia to Garden Key, a path that likely involves crossing one or more West Indian islands from which there are apparently no records of this species (AOU 1983 and Bond 1988). Also, there are apparently no records for Mexico or Central America (AOU 1983). Zimmer states that this species arrives at its wintering grounds in worn plumage (Zimmer 1938); however, the feathers of the observed bird exhibited little or no signs of wear.

The first United States record for this species was in Biddeford, Maine in November 1977 (Abbott and Finch 1978), while the second record was at Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee in May 1984 (see back cover of *Birding* 16(5), 1984). These two sightings occurred considerably north of the present report and later in the year (May and November) than the expected month of arrival on the bird's northern wintering grounds.

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LITERATURE CITED

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