Yucatan Vireo appears in Texas

Tape recordings of* Vireo magister *and* Vireo altiloquus *helped confirm the first appearance of a Yucatan Vireo

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*A Yucatan Vireo (*Vireo magister*) in the hand at Bolivar Peninsula, Texas, April 29, 1984. Note the concolor back, nape and crown. Photo/T.L. Eubanks, Jr.*

ON APRIL 29, 1984, at approximately 11 a.m. CDT, while birding in a small coastal woodlot on Bolivar Peninsula, Galveston County, Texas, we found an unfamiliar vireo foraging in a small hercules club tree. The bird superficially resembled a Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceous*) in overall size and shape, but it was significantly different from this species by being uniformly brown on the crown, nape and back, having black eyes, and possessing a large, heavy bill. After a few minutes of observation in excellent light, we noted that the bird was banded.

In the same woodlot, James G. Massey was conducting a bird-banding operation. While we were present April 29, the vireo was recaptured in one of Massey's mist nets. Massey (*pers. comm.*) told us that on the previous day he had banded the vireo we had under observation and that he had recorded the bird as a Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*).

Ted Eubanks, also an experienced bird bander, made and recorded the following measurements: length—136.5 mm; wing chord—69.5 mm; exposed culmen —15.5 mm; tarsus—19.7 mm. He also took photographs of the bird, in hand, with a Canon A-1 camera, Canon 50 mm f/3.5 macro lens, and Kodachrome ASA 64 film.

Later that same day, Morgan and T. Eubanks consulted several field guides (Blake, 1953, Bond, 1980, Peterson and Chalif, 1973) and an additional reference (Oberholser, 1974) and concluded that the bird in question was a Yucatan Vireo (*Vireo magister*). That evening, Morgan received a phone call from David E. Wolf who was leading a birding tour in Texas. Morgan described the vireo to him and Wolf said the description fit that of a Yucatan Vireo, a species with which he was very familiar.

ON THE MORNING of April 30, Morgan contacted Robert A. Behrstock and asked him if he would try to observe the bird that we believed to be a Yucatan Vireo. Behrstock, an observer with considerable neotropical birding experience, along with Emery M. Froelich, observed the vireo later that day for more than thirty minutes. Behrstock played a tape of a Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*) in the vireo's presence and the bird did not react. That evening Behrstock told Morgan the bird was a Yucatan Vireo.

After clearing access to the private property on which the bird was discovered, its whereabouts was then revealed to the birding community. Subsequently, approximately 1000 observers from the United States and Canada saw it daily through May 17, but it was not seen from May 18 to 23.

On May 24, Wolf relocated the vireo in the same woodlot where initially discovered. He played a Black-whiskered Vireo tape for about thirty minutes before a Red-eyed Vireo and the Yucatan Vireo appeared. Both birds showed only "mild curiosity" to the song of *Vireo altiloquus* and shortly retreated into the vegetation. At this same location later the same day, Victor L. Emanuel and Bret Whitney played a tape of *Vireo magister* which they had previously recorded on Cozumel Island, Mexico. The Yucatan Vireo appeared shortly showing "great curiosity, and the bird was very responsive, flitting from bush to bush" (Emanuel, *pers. comm.*). To the best of our knowledge, the bird was last observed May 27, 1984.

THE MEASUREMENTS and four-color transparencies of the vireo were sent to John P. O'Neill at the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University, and to John W. Fitzpatrick of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, for their corroboration of the bird's identity. O'Neill commented, "There seems to be no doubt that the bird is a Yucatan Vireo. The size of the bill and the color

pretty much preclude anything else." As to form and sex, O'Neill implied the bird was *V.m. magister.* He stated, "The form *V.m. caymannensis* is much paler and really not like the bird in the photos. Your bird is fairly small (several birds in our collection that I measured had wing chords of 73-75 mm); the bill lengths of Yucatan and Black-whiskered [vireos] are nearly equal, but the much-less-deep bill of the Black-whiskered gives it a very long-billed look lacking in the bird in the photo. Your bird is likely a female." O'Neill concluded by saying, "I will state that I have no reason to call the bird in the photo anything but a Yucatan Vireo." Fitzpatrick commented, "I concur with your identification, although the slides do not absolutely rule out the possibility of *Vireo altiloquus*. I assume you did not see any trace of 'whiskers.' Your measurements would correspond well to female *Vireo magister* and actually are a bit small for *altiloquus*. The bill does look properly heavy as in *magister.*" It should be noted that when we studied the bird in the hand and in the field we could find no trace of "whiskers."

The following description was obtained from an in-the-hand examination by the authors: crown, nape, back and rump medium olive brown; the back with brighter olive tones and the rump somewhat paler; tail darker brown, the inner rectricies strongly tinged rufous; wings brown, somewhat darker than back, the outer edges of the primaries brighter olive brown, no wing bars; very broad superciliary stripe whitish, tinged yellowish-buff in front of the eye; lores blackish and postocular stripe brown; cheeks grayish-white without "whisker" marks; auriculars covered by brown postocular stripe; sides of neck medium brown; lower parts dingy grayish-white, the center of the belly laterally tinged pale yellow; sides and flanks grayish-white; crissum faint burnt yellowish-orange; bill large, heavy and deep, the upper mandible blackish and with slight hook at tip, the lower mandible blackish except basal quarter horn color; iris black or near black, no hint of red; legs dark bluish-gray.

THE WOODLOT of approximately five acres in which the bird was found is predominantly composed of hackberry, hercules club (Texas prickly ash), and huisache trees, with yaupon shrubbery included in the understory. There is extensive liana among the hackberry trees. The woodlot, or "motte," is a typical upper Texas coast "migrant trap" which is surrounded by coastal prairie and brackish marsh and is located approximately 600 meters from the shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico. Within the woodlot, the bird was strongly attracted to one or two particular hercules club trees. Its feeding behavior was relatively slow and deliberate, and its prey consisted mostly of small caterpillars, flies, and other insects.

The size of the bill and the color of the bird indicate a Yucatan Vireo. This bird, banded at Bolivar Peninsula, Texas, is most probably a female. Photo/T.L. Eubanks, Jr.

The weather conditions preceding this discovery included several days of abnormally strong south and southeast winds without rain or frontal activity. These are ideal weather conditions for safe trans-Gulf of Mexico migration of those neotropical species that migrate to the United States and Canada for the breeding season. We can only speculate that the bird we discovered crossed the Gulf of Mexico during these very favorable weather conditions. Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that when Eubanks examined the bird he found no deposits of subcutaneous fat in the bird's fulcrum, suggesting a recent expenditure of energy.

The photographs of the Yucatan Vireo remain on file at the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University, and at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. The photographs have also been deposited in the Texas Photo-Record File at Texas A&M University under number 310, a-d.

To the best of our knowledge, this marks the first occurrence of the Yucatan Vireo in the United States. The species is normally resident in the Cayman Islands (Grand Cayman), on the Yucatan Peninsula (including Mujeres, Holbox and Cozumel Islands), south to Belize (including offshore cays), and on the Bay and Hog islands off the Caribbean coast of Honduras (A.O.U., 1983).

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