

Gray Flycatcher: a new breeding bird for Canada

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THE GRAY FLYCATCHER (*EMPIDONAX wrightii*) is the *Empidonax* the Great Basin, breeding in pinyon-juniper woodland, sagebrush, and open, arid Ponderosa Pine woods (A.O.U. 1983). In the early 1970s it extended its range north into southern Washington (Fig. 1), where it was first found breeding at Wenas Park, Yakima County, in 1972 (Larrison, 1971; Yaich and Larrison 1973). By 1974 Gray Flycatchers were very common in Klickitat County and the Wenas Park area (Lavers 1975) and were also present at Robinson Canyon, a few kilometers north of Wenas Park (D.R. Paulson, *pers. comm.*). This northward movement continued and by 1980 Gray Flycatchers were breeding in Okanogan County, Washington, within 75 kilometers of the Canadian border (empty nest found and female with egg in oviduct collected near Twisp, June 23, 1980, by S. Rohwer, Burke Museum, University of Washington #32868; 3 birds at Leader L., Omak, August 20, 1980, Rogers 1981). This note documents the first breeding record of the Gray Flycatcher in Canada.

The first Gray Flycatcher reported from Canada was a vagrant mist-netted and photographed at Toronto, Ontario, on September 11, 1981 (Goodwin 1982). On June 19, 1984, Hue and Jo Ann MacKenzie observed a probable Gray Flycatcher along Camp McKinney Road, 10 kilometers east of Oliver, British Columbia. Their detailed description of the bird, including the characteristic tail-pumping, is quite convincing, but unfortunately the bird did not call and was not photographed.

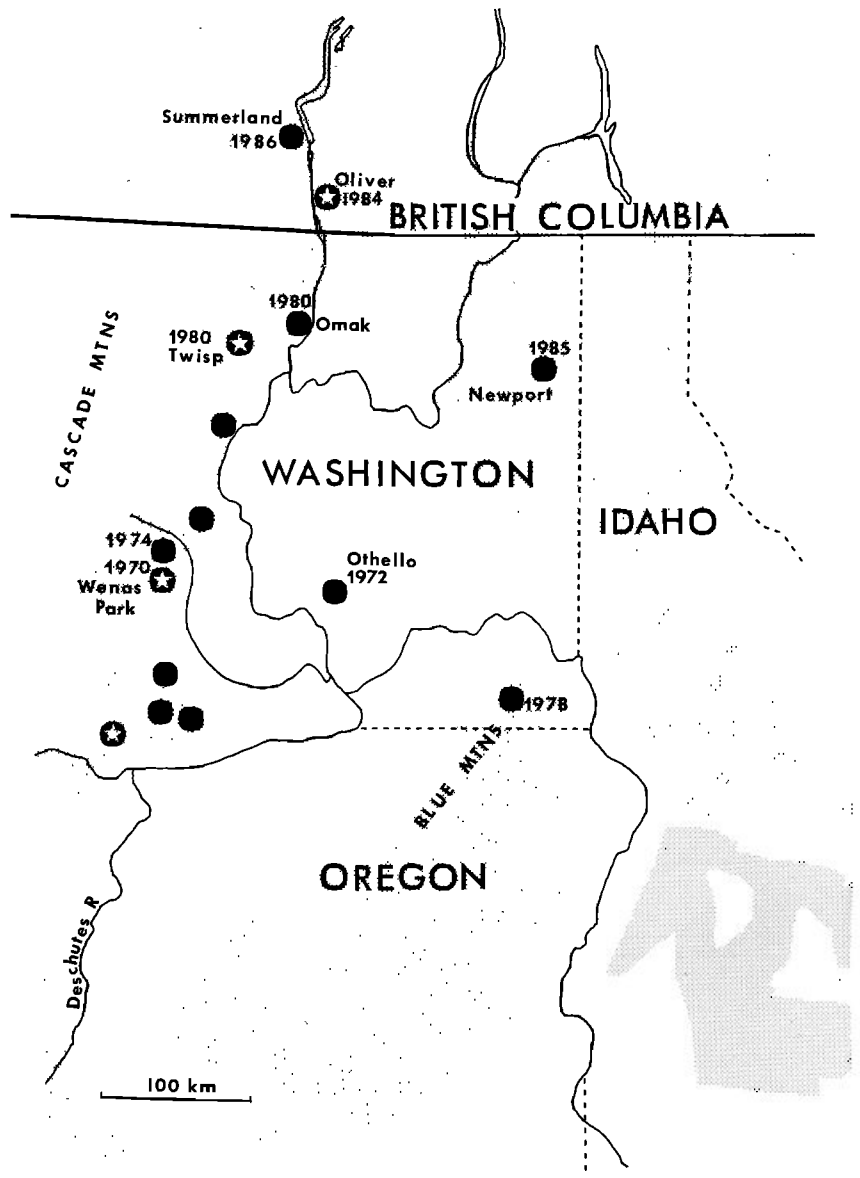


Figure 1. Gray Flycatcher records (closed circles) and breeding sites (starred circles) from Washington and British Columbia, taken from *American Birds* and other sources mentioned in the text. Years given are the first years Gray Flycatchers were recorded from each site; stippling indicates the range of ponderosa pine (from U.S.F.S. 1965).



Above: Nesting habitat of the Gray Flycatcher: open Ponderosa Pine forest with a scattered understory of antelope-brush and sagebrush. Right: Adult Gray Flycatcher on nest 10 kilometers east of Oliver, British Columbia, August 3, 1986. Note long bill, lower mandible pale with dark tip, inconspicuous white eye-ring, and pearl gray coloration of upperparts. Photos/ Steve Cannings.



On May 18, 1986, I heard the distinctive 'chelep chelep . . . chelep sweet!' song of a Gray Flycatcher at the same spot as the 1984 sighting. On the same day, a second bird was heard about 7 kilometers to the southwest by Wayne Weber, Sydney Cannings, and Hue and Jo Ann MacKenzie. The first bird was photographed and its song recorded. It was seen by at least 18 observers on May 18 and 19, but the second bird was never heard or seen again. To our pleasant surprise, the number of singing birds at the Camp McKinney Road site increased steadily, with two on May 20, four on May 29, and thirteen on June 1. These birds were apparently restricted to an area of about 70 hectares; birds in the center of the area were singing about 150 meters apart. Additional photographs and tape recordings were taken throughout this period; the sonograms of the songs exactly match the g^1 and g^2 elements of Gray Flycatcher songs illustrated in Johnson (1963, p. 157). All photographs and sonograms mentioned in this note have been deposited in the British Columbia Provin-

cial Museum (B.C.P.M.) Photoduplicate File #1103, and in the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa.

Several areas of suitable habitat within 30 kilometers of Oliver were searched without success until June 14 when I discovered a second group of at least four Gray Flycatchers singing between Trout and Shingle creeks 5 to 8 kilometers southwest of Summerland, B.C., about 50 kilometers north of Oliver. The songs of two of these birds were tape recorded on June 17.

In the first half of June, intensive searches for nests were made at the Camp McKinney site, but it wasn't until July 6 that a pair of Gray Flycatchers was seen carrying nest material and an almost finished nest was found. Placed against the trunk of a Ponderosa Pine

(*Pinus ponderosa*) on a branch 1.87 meters above the ground, the nest was loosely constructed of sage twigs, grass, small feathers, thistle down, and a few pine needles. It contained two eggs and a cowbird egg on July 10 and four eggs and a cowbird egg on July 18. The cowbird egg was destroyed with a needle on the latter date, and the incubating adult photographed. One of the flycatcher eggs was subsequently found broken below the nest and two others failed to hatch. The latter eggs were collected (B.C.P.M. #2212); one contained a very small embryo and the other an almost completely developed chick. The fourth egg hatched July 27 and the young bird left the nest August 10. The nest was later collected (to B.C.P.M.).

The habitat of both sites is open pon-



Just-fledged juvenile Gray Flycatcher beside nest just east of Oliver, British Columbia, August 10, 1986. Photo/Steve Cannings.

derosa pine forest, with scattered Antelope Brush (*Purshia tridentata*) and Threetip Sagebrush (*Artemisia tripartita*) at Oliver and Buckbrush (*Ceanothus velutinus*) at Summerland. Dusky Flycatchers (*E. oberholseri*) were also common at both sites, but were more evident in the moister habitat typical of small draws.

Exactly when Gray Flycatchers began breeding in Canada is open to debate; the discovery of 17 singing birds up to 65 kilometers north of the border in 1986 would suggest that smaller numbers may have been overlooked for two or three years. However, the known range of the species has expanded northward at least 140 kilometers in the last six years, and 320 kilometers since 1970. This expansion seems to have taken place in an almost linear fashion through Ponderosa Pine forests along the east side of the Cascade Mountains; apparently very little range expansion has been noted in the northeastern part of the species range. Although Ponderosa Pine forests are common in parts of Oregon and central and northern

Idaho (Fig. 1), Gray Flycatchers are essentially restricted to juniper and sagebrush habitats in Oregon and along the southern edge of Idaho (Burleigh 1972; H. Nehls, E.J. Larrison, C. Trost, and D. Stephens, *pers. comm.*). Recent reports of Gray Flycatchers in northern Oregon have been from deciduous habitats along creeks in grassland and agricultural lands (H. Nehls, *pers. comm.*); the 1972 report from Othello, Washington, was from a similar habitat (Lavers 1975). A singing Gray Flycatcher reported near Newport, Pend Oreille County, Washington, in 1985 (E.J. Larrison) had probably moved east from the species' known range in Okanogan County. Lavers (1975) proposed that the range expansion into Washington State involved a population of Gray Flycatchers moving down the Deschutes River in northern Oregon and spreading northward through Klickitat County, Washington. This population was obviously very successful in the open ponderosa pine forests of south-central Washington and quickly spread northward in that habitat, which is common

along the dry east slopes of the Cascades. Suitable habitat extends to the Thompson Valley, 200 kilometers northwest of the present range limit in British Columbia, and there seems to be nothing to prevent the continued northward movement of Gray Flycatchers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Steve and Jean Cannings for their many hours of work searching for, finding, photographing, and observing the nest described in this note. I also thank Harry Nehls, Dennis Paulson, Tim Reynolds, Dan Stephens, Chuck Trost, and Wayne Weber for providing information on the present distribution and status of Gray Flycatchers in the Pacific Northwest; Ned Johnson for confirming the identification of the British Columbia birds; and Hue and Jo Ann MacKenzie for providing excellent details of their 1984 sighting. Sydney Cannings and Wayne Weber commented on an early draft of the manuscript.

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