

NOTES

FISH CATCHING BY A BLACK PHOEBE

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On 7 November 1974 John O'Connell and I observed a Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) catching fish from one of the Henderson sewage ponds in Las Vegas Wash 3 miles (4.8 km) northeast of Henderson, Clark County, Nevada. As this was a form of behavior neither of us had observed previously in any of the Tyrannidae, we continued to study the bird until it ceased foraging activity.

Conditions for observation were excellent. The sky was clear, the sun was behind us, and there was no wind. We observed the bird for about 20 minutes at a distance of about 50 m.

The bird perched on various bare branches of a Salt Cedar (*Tamarix pentandra*) growing from the edge of the sewage pond. The tree was about 2.5 to 3 m in height. The bare limbs extended over the water about 1 to 1.5 m from the edge of the pond. Perches utilized varied from 0.8 to 1.4 m above the water surface and 1 to 1.2 m from the edge of the pond.

The posture of the perched bird was the same as for normal flycatching activity except that the head was tilted toward the water. On leaving the perch, it flew to the surface of the water, hovered, and attempted to catch fish from a small school feeding at the surface. In these efforts the bill was immersed in the water to the base. The bird made no attempt to plunge into the water, and the feathers remained dry.

After catching a fish the bird would return to a perch in the Salt Cedar and tap the fish against a branch until it ceased to struggle and then consume it, apparently head first. This method is essentially the same as employed by Black Phoebes when handling large insect prey such as dragonflies. During this period of observation the bird caught two fish and also took flying insects on two occasions.

One week later O'Connell observed presumably the same bird engaged in similar feeding activity at the same pond. All efforts to obtain movie film footage of this behavior were unsuccessful.

The only species of fish found in the sewage pond is the Mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), a small viviparous member of the family Poeciliidae. Adult males attain a length of one inch (2.54 cm), females 2 inches (5.08 cm). A single mating will produce several broods. Depending on size, a female will produce 10-300 young after a gestation period of 21-28 days (McClane 1965). In discussing food of the Mosquitofish, Schrenkeisen (1938) states the species abounds in all kinds of sluggish water and feeds at or near the surface on small insects, insect larvae and crustaceans.

We noted that feeding forays by schools of Mosquitofish created extensive water surface disturbance. Fish breaking the surface of the water appeared much

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like water beetles moving across the water. Though the water surface was flat calm, there were so many small schools of these fish feeding simultaneously that the surface disturbance appeared as if it were created by wind action. We believe that the actions of the fish were very similar to those of water insects and probably appeared as insects to the bird.

Though this feeding behavior is unusual, it appears to be widespread among the Tyrannidae, particularly in those species closely associated with water. Binford (1957) observed two Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*) catch a total of seven small fish in Jackson Park, Chicago, Illinois. The upper breast, throat, chin, bill, and forehead of these Eastern Phoebes were observed to contact the water as they attempted to catch the fish. All seven fish were apparently alive when taken, as no floating dead fish could be found.

Oberlander (1939) observed a Black Phoebe catching minnows. In this observation the bird immersed the bill almost to the eyes. Once a minnow was caught, it was handled in the same manner as observed by O'Connell and me. Additionally, Gale Monson (pers. comm.) states that he has observed the Black Phoebe taking water insects during periods of cold weather when flying insect activity was at a minimum. Skutch (1960) states that Black Phoebes were observed to pick floating insects from the water surface without wetting their plumage.

Oberholser (1938) states that small minnows make up a part of the diet of the Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) and Smith (1966) alludes to possible fish catching by the same species. In discussing foraging behavior Smith states that kingbirds (*Tyrannus*) take food from on or below the surface of the water.

Skutch (1960) states that Vermilion-crowned (Social) Flycatchers (*Myiozetetes similis*) sometimes wade up to their thighs in shallow pools to catch small tadpoles that rest in the quiet water, or they may perch above deeper water and fly down to pick some floating edible object deftly from the surface without submerging themselves.

Dickey and Van Rossem (in Bent 1942) report that small fish make up a part of the diet of the Kiskadee Flycatcher (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) and that the bird hovers before plunging into the water. Beebe (in Bent 1942) reports that this species obtains small fish and tadpoles by diving into the water in the manner of a kingfisher. Three dives appeared to be all the species can make before allowing the plumage to dry. Skutch (1960) states this species devours tadpoles and minnows for which it plunges into shallow water.

In regard to another species, Bendire (in Bent 1942) quotes George Seagle in stating that the Eastern Wood Pewee (*Contopus virens*) has frequently been seen taking small trout from ponds, and Oberholser (1938) states that this species catches very small fish in ponds.

Thus it would appear that many of the Tyrannidae with close affinities to a riparian environment can be expected to take fish as a part of their diet. It also appears that the feeding activities of small topwater minnows or Mosquitofish probably appear as insect activity to flycatchers. Further study of this behavior in flycatchers could substantially increase our knowledge and understanding of the food requirements in the Tyrannidae.

The order of species presented in this note follows Eisenmann (1955).

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A CRAVERI'S MURRELET FROM OREGON

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On 15 August 1975 I made a brief survey for beached seabirds at Siltcoos State Beach, Lane County, Oregon, in the Oregon Dunes National Monument. In traversing two miles of sandy beach I found the remains of only one bird, a Craveri's Murrelet (*Endomychura craveri*), which I judged to have been dead for about a week. This is the first record for Oregon and extends the post-breeding range of the species northward by some 500 miles. Previously the species had been recorded, irregularly, north to Monterey Bay, California.

The bird, an adult male in worn plumage, showed no evidence of wing molt; body molt, if present, was not detectable due to deterioration. The murrelet's skull had been damaged, presumably by gulls, but the dark face pattern and characteristic long, thin bill were evident. The underwing coverts, which were uniformly dark gray except for a small whitish spot near the axilla, confirmed the identification; the coloration of these coverts matched the darkest extreme shown by the species. (For additional information on morphological variation in *Endomychura* see Jehl and Bond, Trans. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist. 18(2): 9-24, 1975). The skin was beyond saving but the entire skeleton was retained (San Diego Natural History Museum No. 39533).

Recent offshore field work has provided several post-breeding records of Xantus' Murrelet (*Endomychura hypoleuca*) for the coasts of Oregon and Washington (e.g., Scott et al., *Condor* 73: 254, 1971; Sanger, *Condor* 75: 253, 1973; Feinstein, *Auk* 75: 90-91, 1958; Cowan and Martin, *Murrelet*, 35: 50, 1954), and it may be that Craveri's Murrelet, too, is not as rare there as we currently believe.