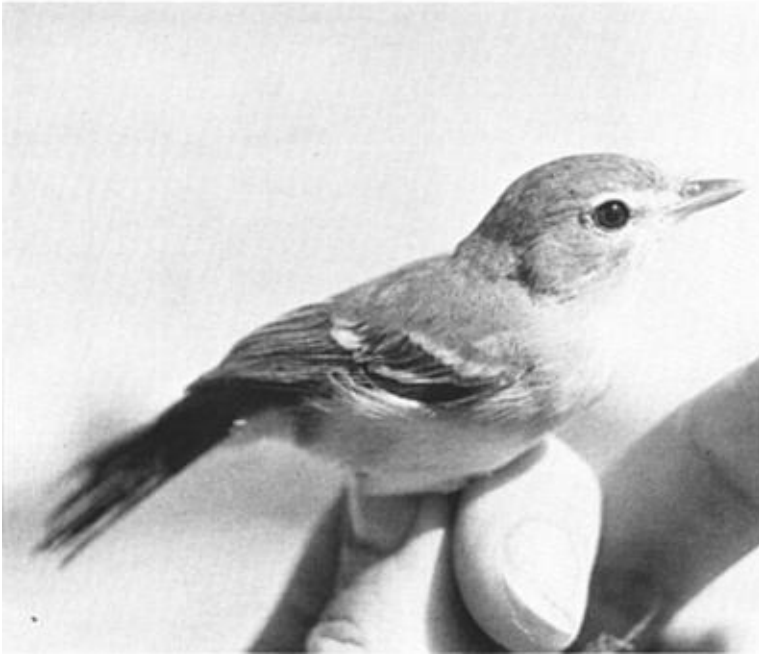


IDENTIFICATION QUIZ



Those of us with more than just a little knowledge of North American birdlife will unhesitatingly identify this issue's quiz bird, at least generically, as a vireo. A small songbird with a uniformly deep, non-conical bill leaves no other choice except, perhaps, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma imberbe*). A tyrannulet, however, would have a smaller, daintier bill than the bird shown here.

Let me add at this point (in an attempt to further confuse the issues) that although this is a black and white print, the color original reveals little more. In life, this bird was white below and gray above with scarcely a trace of green or yellow.

The first step in keying out North American vireos is noting the presence or absence of wingbars. Because the bird shown here clearly has them, Red-eyed (*Vireo olivaceus*), Black-whiskered (*V. altiloquus*), Philadelphia (*V. philadelphicus*) and Warbling (*V. gilvus*, which otherwise would be a definite contender) may be eliminated. White-eyed (*V. griseus*), Black-capped (*V. atricapillus*), Yellow-throated (*V. flavifrons*), and Solitary (*V. solitarius*) vireos may be rejected because of bright yellows and greens in the plumage (a bit hard to see in a black and white photo, eh?) and/or the presence of bold, sharply defined spectacles. Hutton's Vireo (*V. huttoni*) may be excused because it has a stubbier bill, is never clear white below and does not appear "cresty." This leaves only Bell's (*V. bellii*) and Gray (*V. vicinior*) vireos as finalists.

Although Gray Vireo fits the basic pattern shown here, it does not show two distinct wingbars and would always show a round, discreet white eyering on a medium gray face. This leaves as the correct answer Bell's Vireo, subspecifically one of the southwestern races, *pusillus* or *arizonae* (the probable race of the bird shown here).

The older field guides generally neglected western races of Bell's Vireo, which are longer-tailed and less brightly-colored than eastern races. The new wave of bird guides has helped solve this problem in part, two of them actually showing western birds. A western type is fairly well done on page 351 of the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (Washington, D.C., 1983), although the line through the eye is not strong enough and the white superciliary should wisp out behind the eye, not curl down behind it. Also, the anterior wingbar should be more distinct, as is evident in the photo shown here.

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding, Part 3 (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1983) contains a photo of *V.b. pusillus* showing the white eyering broken by a dusky transocular line and pale but indistinctly margined lores that definitely do not qualify as spectacles. The Master Guide photo also shows the distinctly crested look typical of Bell's Vireo. Gray Vireos typically look sleek and round-crowned, but can occasionally look a bit "cresty," as when scolding intruders near a nest.

The poorest representation of Bell's Vireo in any of the major North American guides is that by Arthur Singer in Robbins et al. (*A Guide to Field Identification—Birds of North America*, Golden Press, New York, 1983). The coloration and shape are acceptable for eastern races, but the facial markings and cheek-throat contrast are unrealistic. Any attempt to use the illustrations in this guide to identify a Bell's Vireo in the southwestern U.S. would probably result in misidentification as a Gray Vireo. Additionally, pre-1983 editions of this book erroneously state that Gray is "the only vireo that nervously twitches its tail." Bell's Vireos are easily as twitchy-tailed as Grays. The revised 1983 edition makes brief reference to gray and white races of Bell's Vireo, but only alludes to tail-twitching by Bell's in the text for Gray Vireo.

The bird shown here was photographed in San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico, in December 1975 by Bruce Webb.

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