

Photo Quiz

by
Bob Curry

Answer to Photo Quiz in *Ontario Birds* 11 (2): **White-eyed Vireo**.

At least that's what they told me this was! Seriously, I find myself more like the readers in this case as, in contrast to most such analyses, I was not told any details about this bird or the circumstances which led to its being photographed and printed here. So often it has been my impression that the analysts in the various journals have all the details at hand and describe features which should be there when, to my eye, they are just not visible. To add to the difficulty the bird is rather dishevelled having, presumably, just been plucked from a mist-net.

Clearly the bird is a small passerine; I estimate it to be about 13-14 cm long based on comparisons with the hand holding it. Most readers will have quickly concluded that this is a vireo based on the gestalt of size, shape and bill proportions. Indeed, the bill is rather stout at the base but not conical like a finch or sparrow and tapers abruptly to a point with a slight "overbite" or hook to the upper mandible unlike the slender stiletto shape of most warbler bills. It also has the "big-headed" look common to most vireos. *Empidonax flycatcher* is a possibility in this size range but the body seems too chunky and the head too big. When seen from below many *Empids* have a broad based bill but it tapers to a fine point. Moreover, in side view like this,

Empid bills are much more finely proportioned. Finally, there is the broad white eye-ring which upon close scrutiny, extends through the supraloral area to meet the bill base the commonly named spectacle of several vireo species. This seems rather dull in this specimen but I believe it to be an artifact of back lighting.

Now the real problems, which could easily be resolved in a colour photo, begin! Three Ontario vireos possess the combination of two bold wingbars and prominent spectacles: Yellow-throated, Solitary and White-eyed. As most readers are aware, the dark iris is typical of White-eyed in their first calendar year and, in my experience, this feature seems to be retained by some, into their first spring so this is of little use to us.

An examination of the contour plumage is instructive. The whitish throat and breast which contrasts markedly with the dusky sides of breast and flanks would seem to rule out Yellow-throated which would appear fairly uniform (concolor). Both the other two species have the underpart pattern of the subject bird. One would expect there to be greater contrast between head and back in (at least our race of) the Solitary Vireo with the head appearing darker than the back. This does not appear to be the case here and, in fact, the nape appears lighter than the back but the effect of light and shadow on abnormally ruffled feathers may be a

factor.

Solitary Vireo is a longer-winged bird with the tips of the folded primaries extending almost half way down the tail. White-eyed has shorter wings and this is particularly evident in the photograph. Pyle (*Identification Guide to North American Passerines*) states that some immature White-eyed Vireos have tapered rectrices and our bird certainly has tapered or pointed tail feathers. So the evidence, subtle though it may be, points

towards a hatch year immature White-eyed Vireo. During most falls there is a movement of immature White-eyed Vireos northward into the province especially in October and November.

(Editors' Note: This hatch year White-eyed Vireo was banded at Prince Edward Point in late August, 1980, and was photographed by Doug McRae. In comparison, the next quiz bird should be relatively easy!)



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