

An Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) at Whitby

by
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On 29 October 1982, Mountjoy received a phone call from Dr. Margaret Bain reporting what she believed to be a Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*). She observed the bird earlier that day along the road leading to the east side of Cranberry Marsh in the Lynde Shores Conservation Area at Whitby. Although Dr. Bain is an experienced birder, her views of the bird had been hampered by vegetation. She noted that the bird did not have white outer tail feathers, raising the possibility that it was an even more exotic species. Mountjoy telephoned McRae and we agreed to meet in the area where it had been seen. We independently searched the road down to the marsh without seeing any flycatchers. While returning along the road we flushed a medium-sized passerine from a bush at the edge of the road. As it flew toward a small woodlot we could see rusty tones before the bird disappeared into the vegetation. We followed the bird into the woodlot and attempted to photograph it as it foraged in rather dense brush. Eventually it left the woodlot and flew back to

the bushes along the road edge. We followed the bird as it moved slowly southward, and here McRae photographed it, having identified it as an Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*). By 1700h the light was beginning to fade so we decided to leave and try to contact other birders.

The next day more than 150 birders searched unsuccessfully for the flycatcher, and despite efforts on subsequent days, the bird was not relocated. However, the bird may actually have been present for several days. On 27 October, John Sabean saw a bird in the same general area that he tentatively identified as a Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*), although he realised that it did not look quite right for that species. After viewing the photographs of the Whitby bird, Sabean stated that they appeared to be of the same bird.

Although there were no other birds close enough to the Ash-throated Flycatcher to offer a direct comparison, we both felt that it was slightly larger than an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). The silvery-white throat

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was quite striking and blended into a rather pale grey breast. The belly was light grey with a yellow wash. The wings were generally brown with two buffy wing-bars and pale edgings on the secondaries. Rusty colouration was visible on the primaries, even when the bird was perched. The tail appeared dark brown above but some rustiness was noted on the underside. This rust colour was visible from above only when the bird spread its tail as it took flight. The back was dull brown with the head being slightly darker, especially on the forehead and crown. The head had a high domed appearance due to the long crown feathers, which were sometimes ruffled by a breeze. The bill was dark except for a small fleshy area at the base of the lower mandible.

The bird made no vocalizations during the period of observation. It spent most of its time in fairly dense vegetation including bushes and the lower branches of small trees. Only rarely did it perch more than 2 m above ground, usually staying between 1 to 1.5 m up and occasionally it was almost on the ground. The flycatcher regularly made short flights and appeared to pick insects off the leaves and branches while in flight or briefly hovering. The tendency to remain close to the ground and to glean insects from the vegetation has been noted as a behaviour characteristic of Ash-throated Flycatchers (Murphy 1982).

This is the second of three observations of this species in Ontario and the only one with material evidence. The first record



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The Ash-throated Flycatcher at Whitby.

for the province was of a bird seen by Wilfred Botham at Point Pelee National Park on 24 and 25 November, 1962 (James 1983). Ontario's third Ash-throated Flycatcher was discovered at Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area just nine days after our sighting (see elsewhere in this issue). Late October and early November of 1982 proved to be a very productive period for rare flycatchers in southern Ontario as a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora forficata*) and a Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) were found at Deep River and Ottawa, respectively, in addition to the two Ash-throated Flycatchers. These observations emphasize the importance of carefully scrutiniz-

ing any apparently familiar species seen outside its normal dates of occurrence, keeping in mind the possibility that a similar rare vagrant might be involved.

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Literature Cited:

James, R. D. 1983. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1982. Ontario Birds 1: 7-15.

Murphy, W.L. 1982. The Ash-throated Flycatcher in the east: an overview. American Birds 36: 241-247.

Notes

First Record of Double-Crested Cormorant Nesting on Eastern Lake Erie

In recent years the number of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) nesting on the lower Great Lakes has been increasing. The known colonies, up until this year, have included three islands in eastern Lake Ontario and three islands in wes-

tern Lake Erie (D.V. Weseloh, pers. comm.). For eastern Lake Erie there have been no confirmed records of breeding even though, in recent years, there have been small numbers of summering Double-crested Cormorants with a maximum of 15 individuals on