

## A BREEDING RECORD FOR THE ACADIAN FLYCATCHER IN MASSACHUSETTS

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The distributional history of the Acadian Flycatcher (Empidonax virescens) in the Northeast is one of withdrawal and then gradual recolonization. The American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds (5th edition) describes the Acadian Flycatchers' northeastern breeding range as, "... southern New York, northeastern Pennsylvania, and southwestern Connecticut, casually from Vermont and Massachusetts, south ... ." To this should be pointed out the fact that the single Vermont record (Bennington, 1904) is rather tenuous (see Bagg and Eliot, 1937) and that the species has nested only once in Massachusetts. The single Massachusetts nesting occurred in June 1888, when Fred W. Hill collected one parent and a nest with three eggs in Hyde Park, Suffolk County. The specimen now rests as #245093 at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology.

Bull (1974) gives the status of the Acadian Flycatcher in New York as, "Formerly a local breeder; since 1900 has greatly decreased; now a rare migrant only; no definite breeding for over 45 years." Bull further describes two widely separated geographical units in the New York region: southeastern--Long Island and lower Hudson Valley; and western--Finger Lakes region and Lake Ontario plain. The southeastern population, most especially that on Long Island, may be of significance in the context of events since 1968.

A close perusal of National Audubon Society's American Birds for the past decade reveals that in 1968 the Acadian Flycatcher nested in New England for the first time since the 1906 records cited by Forbush (1927) and Sage and Bishop (1913). The year 1968 marked the beginning of a more or less continuous breeding trend in the Northeast. After the first nesting at Devil's Hopyard State Park, East Haddam, Connecticut, that state had two or three breeding pairs by 1970. In June and July of 1976 and 1977, Acadian Flycatchers nested in Rhode Island in the Parker Woodland near Vernon, establishing first and second state breeding records. Further south, in the Long Island section of John Bull's "southeastern unit", the species made an abortive nesting attempt in 1972 near Nyack on eastern Long Island. By 1973, P. A. Buckley and T. H. Davis stated in American Birds that, "Acadian [Flycatchers] probably bred at 2-3 Long Island locations (a most recent occurrence) ... " (AB, 27:851). By 1976, Buckley and others maintained that the "Acadian Flycatcher continued to consolidate its newly reconquered range in the New York part of the Region ... " (AB, 30:937).

It thus appears that the Acadian Flycatcher is gradually expanding its range northeastward, or is at least reclaiming a previously marginal portion of its northeastern distribution. The probable origin of this northeastward expansion is very likely the coastal plain population existing south of New York and which has gradually colonized Long Island, Connecticut and Rhode Island. To these recent breeding areas should now be added southeastern Massachusetts.

A recent increase in Massachusetts' Acadian Flycatcher migration records were properly put into perspective when the Manomet Bird Observatory

began intensive banding studies in the early 1970's. As a result of continuous late spring mist netting, the species was found to be a regular migrant in small numbers, while field observers began to detect a corresponding increase in singing birds, some being present well into the month of June. With the increase of more reliable banding techniques and increasing sight records of singing birds, the statement by Griscom and Snyder (1955) that the Acadian Flycatcher was a "Casual summer resident . . . . All sight records and banding records of trapped birds are rejected since specimens collected were only Least Flycatchers," is now grossly outdated. Since 1970, the species has proven to be of annual occurrence in the eastern part of the Commonwealth, with records extending north to Essex County and west to the Connecticut Valley area.

This trend seemed to point to the inevitable re-nesting of the Acadian Flycatcher in Massachusetts. This breeding was realized in 1977. On June 26, 1977, the writer, accompanied by Kathleen Anderson, observed a singing Acadian Flycatcher in Middleboro, Plymouth County. The bird was not far from the Lakeville town line and was within a mile of Lake Assawompsett. The habitat was a wooded glen, watered with a small brook and overgrown with maples, ash, tupelo, American holly, locust and a variety of smaller shrubs. While being observed, the bird sang two songs typical of the species; however the characteristic "wee-seet" song was most frequent.

A return visit by the writer on the 29th confirmed the presence of a highly territorial pair of birds, with all indications of the area being a probable nesting site. Confident of establishing a nesting record, another visit on the 30th with Richard Forster and Elizabeth Phillips was successful in producing a partially constructed nest about 10' above the ground, braced on a horizontal fork 7' from the trunk of a large tupelo tree. Not wishing to disturb the birds further, a return visit was delayed until July 8th, at which time a parent bird was incubating eggs while the mate called nearby. A final visit on July 17th found the nest empty and only one adult on hand. Evidence suggested that the nest was robbed by a predator, as no remains of egg shells or other traces of fledging were present. The nest was collected and is now in the possession of the writer.

While such range expansions can prove temporary (for example, Hooded Warbler [Wilsonia citrina]), it is likely, if the present trend continues, that in years to come Massachusetts' ornithologists will find an increase in the breeding status of the Acadian Flycatcher in the Commonwealth.

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#### DRUMLIN FARM PEREGRINES

Of the three Peregrine Falcons raised at Drumlin Farm in Lincoln, as part of the Cornell University Peregrine Project, only one may be still surviving in the wild. One Peregrine was accidentally electrocuted this summer, and a second was shot by a person shooting pigeons in Cranbury, New Jersey. In an out-of-court settlement with the New Jersey Division of Fish and Game, Stanley Bystreck agreed to pay \$2,000.00 to the Peregrine Project. This sum is approximately the cost of rearing a replacement according to Thomas Cade, director of the Peregrine Project.

T. H. A.

#### NEW BREEDING SPECIES

The Breeding Bird Atlas Project has completed the fourth year of its five year study. So far 13 species have been confirmed that are new breeders to the state of Massachusetts or have not been known to breed here for decades. The most recent confirmations have been Rusty Blackbirds in Savoy State Forest, Red-bellied Woodpeckers in South Natick, and Acadian Flycatchers in Middleboro. Other nesting species are Glossy Ibis', Cattle Egrets, Louisiana Herons, Willets, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Northern Shovelers, Ruddy Ducks, American Wigeons, Fish Crows, and Common Loons. Both the Ruddy Ducks and Common Loons were nesters many years ago, and the only previous nesting of Acadian Flycatchers occurred at Hyde Park in 1888.

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#### 150 BALD EAGLES

The wintering population of Bald Eagles in the state of Maine may be about 150. This number was arrived at by ground and aerial observations by the Eagle Project at the University of Maine, Orono.

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