

Basic Plumage in the Male Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.—Confusion exists in the literature regarding the appearance of the adult male Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*) after the prebasic molt in fall. Coues (1872), Roberts (1936), Wood (1969), Oberholser (1974), Peterson and Chalif (1973), and most other workers have described the adult male as having a black line extending from the center of the forehead back over each eye, forming a "V" in all plumages. However, Dwight (1900), Phillips, Marshall, and Monson (1964), and Phillips, Speich, and Harrison (1973) noted that the black V is absent in adult males in basic plumage ("winter plumage" in Dwight).

We banded 63 gnatcatchers in fall (15 Aug.–1 Nov.) 1973 and 1974 at the Welder Wildlife Foundation, Sinton, TX. None of these birds had a black V. Additionally we collected 26 individuals. Six of these were males with completely pneumatized ("ossified") skulls taken in September. From a sample of 11 other birds with incompletely pneumatized skulls, it appears that pneumatization is generally $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{2}{3}$ complete by the end of September with some birds (three in our sample) still having incompletely pneumatized skulls in early November. Thus the six males were probably adults, none of which showed any traces of a black V.

Examination of *P. caerulea* specimens at the National Museum of Natural History (USNM) revealed only one of 25 males taken between 1 August and 15 January that showed a black V. This anomalous individual (#90628) was taken on 9 Nov. 1882 in New Orleans, LA. Our data and those from USNM indicate that Dwight, and more recently Phillips and his co-workers were correct. Adult males in basic plumage are similar to females and immatures. They have no black V.

Data from the collection at the University of Minnesota and USNM show that most adult males (16 specimens) have molted from the black V (alternate) plumage by early August, whereas molt from basic to alternate begins in late January. One specimen (USNM) taken in Cuba on 27 January shows molt on the crown. By mid-February most male specimens show the black V, although Phillips (pers. comm.) reports a molting bird taken on 5 March.

We found no satisfactory method for sexing birds in the hand in basic plumage (August–February). Males tend to have a longer wing chord (\bar{x} = 51.9 mm, n = 32) than females (\bar{x} = 49.6 mm, n = 13) but considerable overlap exists. Males also tend to show greater contrast between the bluish back and the grayish-white underparts, but some females show nearly as much contrast as males.

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