

## THE THICK-BILLED VIREO, *VIREO CRASSIROSTRIS* (AVES: VIREONIDAE), A NEW ADDITION TO THE CUBAN AVIFAUNA

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*Vireo crassirostris* was first described by Bryant in 1859 and given the Island of New Providence as the type locality. Later, other taxa now considered conspecific were described: *Vireo alleni* by Cory in 1886 from Grand Cayman; *Vireo crassirostris* by Ridgway in 1884 from the island of Old Providence, and in 1886 *Vireo crassirostris flavescens*, from Rum Key and Conception Island in the Bahamas; and *Vireo crassirostris tortugae* by Richmond in 1917 from Ile de la Tortue, Haiti, in 1817. Bond (1956), cited *tortugae*, *approximans* and *crassirostris*, although, under this latter subspecies, he included the populations from Cayman Islands.

Buden (1985) described a new race, *Vireo crassirostris stalagmium*, from the Caicos Islands, and having studied a large number of specimens not previously examined by other workers, made a revision of all known populations of this species, providing a table with the standard measurements as well as a comparative figure of variation in plumages among Bahaman populations. The same author (1987) offered additional comments and provided new distributional data for this species on the Ragged Islands and Cay Sal Bank.

We follow Buden's (1985) distributional arrangement of *Vireo crassirostris* populations as follows: *Vireo crassirostris crassirostris* (Bryant), several Bahaman Islands (see Buden 1985); *Vireo crassirostris stalagmium* Buden, several Caicos Islands (Buden 1985); *Vireo crassirostris tortugae* (Cory), the Cayman Islands (Buden 1985). *Vireo crassirostris approximans* (Ridgway) from Isla Providencia, including Catalina Island, is often cited as a member of this species but is a race of *Vireo pallens* (Barlow, pers. comm., and record of

vocalizations, 1990; also Sibley & Monroe 1990). Examining the distribution of all these races, it is interesting to note that populations of *Vireo crassirostris* located in the North, East and South, practically surround Cuban territory.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On October 16, 1989 the senior author, in the company of Alberto Estrada, stayed 6 days at Key Paredón Grande, North of Camagüey Province. Among the birds collected were two specimens of *Vireo crassirostris*, the first two individuals of this species known to have been captured on Cuban territory.

In 1990 the senior author revisited the Key. During this trip, 7 additional individuals of *crassirostris* were captured. The first one was taken in a net, and after banding was released, but was then caught by a Kestrel (*Falco sparverius* ssp.). The vireo was rescued, but was in poor condition. Then Kirkconnell went on to explore other parts of the Key, collecting six more vireos. Some were found in mixed groups with warblers, and other individuals were alone or even in pairs. The vireos foraged low, between 0.10–1.5 m, in shrubby vegetation. They were highly vocal, continually singing full songs. Altogether 12 birds were seen along 800 m of the trail.

Previously, in early October 1979, in the environs of the river Sierra Morena, north coast of Las Villas Province, the junior author observed a group of 8 vireos in the company of some migrant warblers. All vireos had brown eyes. They were observed foraging quietly at different levels in the vegetation. At that time

they were thought possibly to be young White-eyed vireos (*Vireo griseus*), in spite of the fact that this species has never been seen in groups in Cuba, either as a winter resident or as a migrant in transit to wintering grounds farther South. Three days later, on October 5th, the junior author visited Cayo Cinco Leguas, North of Matanzas Province. Among the birds observed were another group of these presumed Thick-billed vireos, foraging low among the shrubs and the scattered low vegetation of that part of the Key. All these vireos had brown eyes as well, and were likewise silent.

The eight specimens collected, now deposited in the Cuban National Museum of Natural History, have the following measurements (in mm) in both sexes: wing 60–63 (61.7); tail 42–51 (45); culmen 11.5–14.1 (12.6); body mass 12.5–16.2 g (13.8 g). The series is uniform in having yellow overall on the vent without any white feathers. The upperparts are olive with a slightly more grayish head. Plumage color and measurements are in agreement with those given by Buden (1985: 593–594) for the nominate race *Vireo crassirostris crassirostris*.

The specimens are the first records of the Thick-billed vireo in Cuba. It's interesting to mention that this species was also reported for the first time for the United States based on 3 individuals recorded and photographed in Southern Florida (Smith *et al.*, 1990: 372–376).

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