

NOTES

SECOND DOCUMENTED RECORD OF THE BLACK PHOEBE IN CANADA

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At about 1300 on 26 April 1980 Brian Kautesk found a Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) in Stanley Park, Vancouver, British Columbia. The bird was flycatching along the shore of Lost Lagoon, a small freshwater lake in the park, where it remained until the evening of 27 April. It occupied a small island covered with Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*), Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa* var. *arborescens*), and other small trees and shrubs, some of which were dead. It usually perched low, not more than 3-4 m above the water.

At least 16 competent observers, including Gerry and Wendy Ansell, Audrey Banton, Dan Bastaja, Norm Chesterfield, Mark Daly, Al and Jude Grass, John and Teresa Ireland, Doug Kragh, Allen Poynter and the four of us, saw the Black Phoebe. Richard Cannings, Al Grass and Robin Weber obtained recognizable photographs (see Figure 1), which have been deposited in the Photoduplicate File at the British Columbia Provincial Museum, Victoria (BCPM photorecord 658). In addition, Wayne Weber and Brian Kautesk took detailed field notes, also on file at the Provincial Museum.



Figure 1. Black Phoebe at Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park, Vancouver, British Columbia, 26 April 1980.

Photos by Robin R. Weber (left), Richard J. Cannings (right)

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This constitutes only the second documented record of the Black Phoebe in Canada. The first was a bird collected by R.A. Cumming at Vancouver on 11 November 1936 (Cowan 1939, Munro and Cowan 1947; British Columbia Provincial Museum specimen 6914). However, another reported sighting, not previously published, deserves mention here. On 28 May 1978 F. Lewis Jones and Doreen Jones reported seeing a Black Phoebe on the University of British Columbia campus in Vancouver. In a letter to David Mark, written 2 days after the sighting, Mr. Jones stated: "The black head and breast were clearly discernible, as was the white belly and the tail wagging. It was singing while we watched it and its song conformed with the song of a Black Phoebe that I have on a recording of bird songs." Mr. and Mrs. Jones had seen Black Phoebes previously in California. Although this record must be considered unsubstantiated, as the bird was not photographed and no field notes were made at the time of observation, it seems highly probable that the identification was correct.

The Black Phoebe normally breeds from northern California and southwestern Utah south to northern Argentina (Bent 1942, Godfrey 1966). Although Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) list it as hypothetical in Oregon, it has nested regularly in extreme southwestern Oregon since at least 1958 (Boggs and Boggs 1961, Ramsey 1978), with occasional records north to at least Eugene. In Washington, the first well-documented record was one seen on 27 February 1980 at Moclips Beach, Grays Harbor County (Mattocks and Hunn 1980). Black Phoebes are largely nonmigratory, and occurrences far north of the breeding range are quite rare.

The 1980 Black Phoebe at Vancouver appeared during the height of spring migration, suggesting that it may have been an individual which had unusually strong migratory tendencies and which "overshot" the species' normal breeding range. The phenomenon of "overshooting" has been documented for many bird species when periods of warm weather and southerly winds occur during the spring migration (for examples, see Gauthreaux 1973). Temperatures at the Vancouver International Airport averaged 4°F above normal from 23 to 26 April, with light southeasterly winds on the 24th, which could have provided favorable conditions for the phoebe to migrate. In any event, the Black Phoebe does not often occur as a long-distance vagrant, and it seems unlikely to occur again in British Columbia in the near future.

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