

SAYORNIS SAYA YUKONENSIS IS VALID

ROBERT W. DICKERMAN, Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) nests in western North American from subarctic Alaska south to central Mexico. Four subspecies of it have been named. From north to south these are *S. s. yukonensis* Bishop (type locality Glacier, White Pass, Alaska), *S. s. saya* (Bonaparte) (type locality near Pueblo, Colorado), *S. s. quiescens* (type locality San José about 45 miles east of San Quintín, Baja California), and *S. s. pallida* (Swainson) (type locality southern central plateau of Mexico). Browning (1976) reviewed the literature on Say's Phoebe and in a detailed study of a large collection of adults reached the conclusion that *yukonensis* is not valid on either the basis of color or by measurements. He reiterated the problems in assessing geographic variation in this species: fading of the plumage because of exposure to the sun (considerable in this species of open habitats that molts only once per year) and foxing of the plumage (shifting of grays to browns with a specimen's age in the museum). Rea (1983) enlarged on the problems, pointing out that the birds may leave nesting areas prior to molting and that wintering populations may be mixed, consisting of two or more subspecies. He suggested that birds in fresh juvenal plumage may be the best basis for working out geographic variation in the species, and he noted that 9 of the 11 specimens in the type series of *yukonensis* are juveniles (Bishop 1900). Browning did not mention the juvenal plumage. Rea (1983:185, map) extended the nesting range of *quiescens* from Baja California to central Arizona (Pima and Pinal counties).

Rea (1983) wrote that "juvenal specimens from Alaska, eastern Oregon east at least to Denver and south apparently to Zuni, New Mexico, and perhaps the higher elevations of northern Arizona are darker, with distinctly darker crowns and broad, dark gray chest bands that invade more or all the throat," that is, nominate *saya*. He noted that paler young from Baja California and Lower Sonoran portions of Arizona represent the paler *quiescens*. He studied 20 specimens in juvenal plumage from Alaska to Baja California (pers. comm.).

With three recently taken juveniles and a bird in freshly molted basic plumage from the University of Alaska Museum at hand, I reexamined specimens in comparable plumage in the U.S. National Museum of Natural History. Because of the problems of foxing in older specimens elucidated by Browning (1976) and Rea (1983), I compared only depth or darkness of color. Seven of nine juveniles from Alaska were darker dorsally than ten of eleven juveniles of *saya* from Montana, Idaho, Colorado, Nebraska, and New Mexico (Fort Wingate and Capitan Mountains—both "northern" New Mexico localities), with dark crowns contrasting more sharply with the back. One from Tolugak Valley, Alaska (USNM 435243), was inseparable from the series of *saya*, and one from Lewiston, Idaho (USNM 563463) was dark like the specimens from Alaska, though its crown and back were nearly concolor, as in *saya*.

I compared six July–August specimens in fresh basic plumage from Alaska to six from Oregon, Idaho, and New Mexico. All were definitely darker dorsally than five of the six southern birds. The Alaska specimens are darker on the throat and breast band, but five of the six are somewhat less ochraceous on the belly than the specimens of *saya*. One bird from Oregon (USNM 259774), taken 27 August, fits the Alaska series dorsally and on the throat. It probably represents an early migrant of *yukonensis* and was so annotated by H. C. Oberholser and J. W. Aldrich.

Earlier, I compared the four recently taken Alaska birds with ten older Colorado birds from the Denver Museum of Natural History and a larger series of New Mexico and Arizona specimens at the Museum of Southwestern Biology. Within groups defined by similar age and plumage wear, Alaska birds were darker than those from Colorado, and Colorado birds were darker than those from central and southern New

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Mexico and Arizona. The sharpest break was between Colorado and central and southern New Mexico and Arizona, corresponding to the break between nominate *saya* and *quiescens*.

Although the numbers of specimens examined are relatively small, considering the agreement between these two studies using the recently taken Alaska series and two different series of adults and juveniles, I recommend recognizing *Sayornis saya yukonensis*. It is darker in both juvenal and basic plumages, with the crown contrasting with the back, and with darker throat and breast than in comparable specimens of *S. s. saya*.

Thanks to the University of Alaska Museum and the Denver Museum of Natural History for the loan of specimens and to the curators and staff of the National Museum of Natural History for access to that incredible collection.

LITERATURE CITED

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Accepted 1 April 2005