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Gray Flycatcher at Oliver Reservoir

Stephen J. Dinsmore, Loren Padelford, and Babs Padelford

On 17 May 1999, we were birding near the main entrance of Oliver Reservoir State Recreation Area in Kimball County, Nebraska. At 8:05 a.m. we found a very gray *empidonax* flycatcher in the scattered trees south of the main entrance. After studying the bird for a few minutes, we concluded that

the bird was a Gray Flycatcher. We studied and photographed the bird at close range until we left at 8:55 a.m.

The bird was clearly an *empidonax* because of the small size and typical flycatcher behavior. What initially caught our attention was the very lead gray appearance of this bird. The head, mantle, and tail were dull gray, contrasting with the white underparts. On the basis of these features alone, this bird stood out from the approximately eighty *empidonax* flycatchers we had seen in Nebraska in the previous two weeks. The general appearance was that of a long-billed, small-headed, long-tailed *empidonax*. The wings appeared dark gray, but we later noticed some brown color on the primary shafts when the bird was viewed through a scope. The wing showed two narrow white wingbars. The primary projection was very short, giving the bird a short-winged look that accentuated the long-tailed appearance. The bird had a narrow white eyering that was obvious only at close range. The bill was rather long with a pale base to the lower mandible. The tail was dark gray with conspicuous white outer tail feathers, easily seen when the bird was foraging. Perhaps the most distinctive behavior of this bird was the constant tail-pumping, a behavior that was reminiscent of a phoebe. The tail was dropped slowly, then rapidly returned to its normal position. The bird did not vocalize. The combination of general coloration, tail-pumping behavior, bill size and color, short primary projection, pattern of the rectrices, and facial pattern eliminates all other *empidonax* flycatchers.

This sighting represents the first record of a Gray Flycatcher in Nebraska. The species occurs regularly as close as Colorado, breeding locally in the extreme southeastern corner of the state (Las Animas and Bent counties) and across much of the western third of the state (Andrews and Righter 1992). It is a casual spring migrant on the eastern plains of Colorado, usually in May. In 1999, there were two records from this area on 18 April and 8 May. It is likely that this species will occur in Nebraska again, probably in May and most likely somewhere in the western Panhandle.

Literature Cited

Andrews, R., and R. Righter. 1992. Colorado Birds. Denver Museum of Natural History, Denver, CO. 442 pp.