3-2001

First Confirmed Records of Dusky Flycatcher for Nebraska

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Prior to the fall of 2000, there were no accepted records of Dusky Flycatcher for Nebraska. With the exception of a single sight record by Silcock (17 May 1992) judged "Hypothetical" by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, this species had been unreported in Nebraska. Dusky Flycatchers breed locally in the Black Hills of South Dakota (Peterson 1990) and were presumed to occur in western Nebraska. Here, we report the capture of three Dusky Flycatchers in Kimball County and three additional sight records from western Nebraska.

On 31 August 2000, we were mist netting below the dam of Oliver Reservoir in Kimball County. At 10:05 a.m., we captured an *Empidonax* that we suspected was a Dusky Flycatcher. We returned to the car to measure and photograph the bird before releasing it at 10:45 a.m. The bird was clearly an *Empidonax* flycatcher on the basis of the small size, wingbars, eyering, and bill shape. The bill was rather long with a moderately broad base and a strong triangular shape (the sides of the bill were not convex). The underbill was bright orange at the base with the proximal one half being dark-colored. The color distinction on the underbill was not sharp, but was instead rather gradual. There were prominent whiskers (at least 1 cm in length) at the base of the bill. The head was dark gray, a bit darker on the crown. The bird had a prominent white eyering that broadened slightly behind the eye (a "teardrop" shape). The throat was paler and contrasted with the darker olive-gray upper breast. The mantle was olive and distinctly contrasted with the grayer head. The wings were dark with two clear white/buff wingbars. The rectrices were dark olive. The legs were black. The bird did not vocalize. After photographing the bird, we took a series of measurements suggested by Pyle (1997) to confirm our identification (see Table 1). The primary projection was short, and we also noted that p4 and p10 were roughly the same length. On the basis of moderate feather wear, ossified skull, underbill coloration, and plumage, we concluded the bird was an adult Dusky Flycatcher. Furthermore, on the basis of the relatively short (for a Dusky Flycatcher) measures for wing and tail lengths, we concluded the bird was probably a female, but this conclusion is by no means solid.

On 7 September 2000, Dinsmore and Loren and Babs Padelford were mist netting along the north side of Oliver Reservoir when they captured an *Empidonax* at approximately 12:00 p.m. The bird bore a strong resemblance to a Dusky Flycatcher the authors had captured there on 31 August. With that possibility in mind, they took the bird back to the car for measurement (see Table 1). While in the hand, the bird vocalized several times. Mostly, it gave a single, high-pitched "whee" note, although it also gave a raspy "burr" note on a coupe of occasions. On the basis of the very fresh plumage, they speculated that the bird was a juvenile Dusky Flycatcher. The bird did not have any wear in either the flight feathers or rectrices that would be more suggestive of an adult bird.

On 20 September 2000, Dinsmore was birding the north side of Oliver Reservoir when he noticed an *Empidonax* feeding along the edge of a willow thicket. He observed the bird for a couple of minutes at close range and identified it as a Dusky Flycatcher. Features noted included the gray head contrasting with the olive mantle, the short primary projection, the orange underbill with a dusky tip, the white, teardrop-shaped eyering, and the bill which was of medium length and fairly broad. At 9:30 a.m., the bird was captured in a nearby mist net. Because of the close proximity of the bird to the net, and the fact that there were no other *Empidonax* observed at Oliver Reservoir that day, he concluded that both encounters were with the same bird. After capturing the bird, he took it back to the car and took a series of measures suggested by Pyle (1997) to confirm the identification (see Table 1).

All of the measurements in Table 1 fall within the range for Dusky Flycatcher (see Pyle 1997). Separation from other species of *Empidonax* was based on a wide range of morphological and plumage characters. Bill shape (sides of bill straight, not convex) and coloration should eliminate all eastern *Empidonax* flycatchers. This elimination leaves four other species to consider: Gray, Hammond's, Cordilleran, and Pacific-Slope flycatchers. The combination of bill color (underbill not solidly orange), feather measurements, and narrower bill eliminates Cordilleran and Pacific-Slope flycatchers. Gray Flycatcher was eliminated on the basis of plumage coloration (e.g., olive mantle), specific pattern on underbill (dark coloration reduced and much more sharply defined on Gray Flycatcher), and series of wing and tail measurements (most of these overlap for the two species, but all measurements were more "normal" for Dusky Flycatcher and often unusually small or large for Gray Flycatcher). Hammond's Flycatcher was eliminated on the basis of plumage coloration, the short primary projection, and morphology (especially the various wing and wing minus tail measurements).

In addition to the above records, there were three additional sight reports of Dusky Flycatchers in fall 2000. These included single birds spotted on 21 July at Wellfleet, Lincoln Co. (WRS, pers. obs.); 11 September at Mud Springs, Morrill Co. (SJD, pers. obs.); and 20

September at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co. (SJD, pers. obs., Helen Hughson). Each of these birds was identified by a combination of features including short primary projection, bill shape, color pattern on the underbill, plumage, and call notes.

On the basis of the reports for fall 2000, it appears that Dusky Flycatcher may be a regular fall migrant throughout the Nebraska Panhandle, with a few possibly occurring farther east. It is also interesting that all three *Empidonax* captured at Oliver Reservoir turned out to be Dusky Flycatchers. More netting will be necessary before we fully understand the occurrence of the various *Empidonax* in western Nebraska. However, it is now clear that Dusky Flycatcher occurs there and indeed may be one of the more common species in fall.

Literature Cited

Peterson, R.A. 1990. A birdwatcher's guide to the Black Hills. PC Publishing, Vermillion, South Dakota.

Pyle, P. 1997. Identification guide to North American Birds. Part I. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California. 732 pages.

Table 1. Measurements taken from Dusky Flycatchers captured at Oliver Reservoir, Kimball County, Nebraska in fall 2000.

	31 August	7 September	20 September
Wing (natural wing chord)	64.9	65.1	67.9
Tail length	59.9	61.0	62.5
Wing minus tail	5.0	4.1	5.4
Bill length (nares to tip)	6.6	7.6	7.4
Bill width	4.3	4.5	4.7
Longest primary	64.9	63.2	62.7
Longest secondary	50.4	52.8	51.7
Longest primary (p8) minus longest secondary	14.5	10.5	11.0
Longest primary (p8) minus p6	3.0	1.3	1.5
p6 minus p10	8.8	8.0	9.2
p9 minus p5	5.4	2.9	3.4

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