

Western Wood-Pewee  
21 Jun 1979  
Elm Lake, Wright Co., IA  
\*Joe Schaufenbuel  
Schaufenbuel 1979

Record Number: 81-FV  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Joe Schaufenbuel

REFERENCE

Schaufenbuel, J. 1979. First Western Pewee for Iowa. IBL  
49:86.

VOTE (1981): 6-III, 1-IV

III, reliable observer, only thing better would be a tape  
recording.

III, Good observer and good details.

III, Voice, description OK; obs. familiar, details good.

IV, Single observer -- Wood Pewee singing a Western song.

While the Western Pewee can be reliably identified by call within its range, the question is whether one has the same security when the bird occurs extraliminally. Because E. and W. Pewee are so similar in appearance, the call is frequently cited as the only satisfactory way to separate them in the field. E. Pewees have a variety of calls on their breed ground besides the classic 3 and 2 note 'pewee' calls. I am aware of none that resemble that of the W. Pewee (But I don't know the Western Pewee that well). Call variations are due to (1) individuality (2) regional differences (3) drugs (and possibly pesticides and herbicides?) (4) perhaps learned response, etc. The possibility of a bizarre call by one species bearing superficial similarity to another may be very low, but so is the probability of a Western Pewee in Iowa. To establish a W. Pewee in Iowa under field conditions, I think one needs voice recordings together with multiple observers who can attest to the source of the call. Perhaps this observer might be invited to do a thorough search of the literature on vocalizations of E. and W. Pewees.

III, already accepted by RC. [refers to old Checklist  
Committee/THK]

[See continuation of this record: 81-FV\*A-D]

Western Wood-Pewee  
21 Jun 1979  
Elm Lake, Wright Co., IA  
\*J. Schafenbuel  
re-reviewed 1989

Record Number: 81-FV  
Classification: \*A-D

REVOTE (1989): 7 A-D

A-D: Beyond the fact that this document established the bird to be a wood-pewee, we have no other way to separate from Western than by voice. The bird repeated its song often enough for be to believe it was natural and not a mimicked call.

A-D: A number of factors are in favor of this identification. First, Schafenbuel was familiar with songs of both species and also had a knack for hearing, learning, and distinguishing bird sounds. Second, this bird gave a call repeatedly described by Schafenbuel as "bree-zu". This is very similar to the second part of the Western Wood-Pewee song as described by Kaufman (ADVANCED BIRDING, 1990) as "pzzeeeyer" (p. 182). Kaufman goes on to say that "The second part is often given alone, ESPECIALLY AT MID-DAY AND DURING SPRING MIGRATION" (emphasis mine). For a bird that was possibly a spring overshoot on 21 June at 12 noon, this fits the present record very nicely.

A-D: Except for Kaufman (ADVANCED BIRDING, 1990) most writers feel the highly different vocalizations of Eastern and Western Wood-Pewee are diagnostic. Kaufman agrees except during rare occasions when dealing with juvenile birds or birds involved in "agressive interactions." By date, this bird was clearly not a juvenile. According to the documentation, the bird was involved in aggressive interaction. This appears to be a negative factor. On the other hand, this would be the time of year a wayward (but late) migrant might appear. The song described by Schafenbuel is clearly that of a Western. Also, Wright Co. is not that far from SW Minn. locations where there are presumably confirmed breeding records of the Western. Although I never met him, I understand he has a notoriously keen ear and had experience with the species. With regard to the plumage description, I must take the conservative and generally accepted view that the two species cannot be separated in the field, at least safely. The description as grayer is supportive, although highly subjective. All things considered, I'm not sure how "beyond reasonable doubt" fits in, but I do feel Schafenbuel found a Western Wood-Pewee.

A-D: I think the description of the song is convincing since it was heard 30 times in a row by an experienced observer. I am discounting a buzzy Eastern Wood-Pewee because I don't think a bird would consistently give this unnatural call 30 times over. The white throat does seem to favor Eastern, but is not conclusive one way or the other.

A-D: According to Kaufman (ADVANCED BIRDING, 1990) the description given could be either Eastern or Western, possibly favoring a Western a minute amount but not enough to say conclusively which species this might be. With the same buzzy nasal call being given as many as 30 times during a somewhat short time interval with no variation would point toward a

Western. Kaufman says the second part (harsh and burry) is often given alone, especially at mid-day (as in this record) and during spring migration. The call described by Schafenbuel adequately describes this second part of the full Western Wood-Pewee song. Schafenbuel states that he is familiar with Western's song from three states but does not say how this bird's song compared to those he heard in those states. I think this record is still beyond reasonable doubt.

A-D: I feel this is a good record of a Western Wood-Pewee in Iowa.

A-D: Call heard repeatedly. At no time did bird give call reminiscent of E. Pewee. Also, plumage description, although by itself not diagnostic, adds to record in a positive way.

## Western Wood Pewee

12. (462). *Contopus richardsoni* (Swainson). Western Wood Pewee.

Anderson 1907  
p 388

The Western Wood Pewee is listed as a common summer resident in western Nebraska; east, but not common, to Dismal River, Thomas county; also reported from Sidney and Wood River" (Rev. Birds Neb., pp. 67-8). Kumlien and Hollister state: "Several typical Western Wood Pewees have been taken at Lake Koshkonong. One pair, with nest and eggs, were identified by Dr. Coues as unquestionably of this species" (Birds of Wis., 1903, p. 82). As Iowa is midway between these points, the species may unquestionably be expected to occur in the state.

Schaufenbuel, J. 1979. First Western Pewee for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 49:86

**First Western Pewee for Iowa** -- On June 21, 1979, I discovered a Western Pewee (*Contopus virdidulus*) at Elm Lake in Wright County. The bird was first located when its distinct nasal, buzzy 'bree-zu' call was heard. Investigating I observed the bird perched mid-way up in a Cottonwood, about 25 feet high. The bird sang frequently giving its call about 30 times during the 12 minutes the pewee was under observation. The bird made several kingbird-style attacks on House Sparrows and a Common Flicker that flew nearby. The Western Pewee moved from perch to perch after each feeding or attack flight, taking the bird farther from the original point of first sighting with each flight. Eventually the bird took a long flight and became lost from view as it apparently became nonvocal, and could not be relocated.

In size, shape and actions the bird was much like an Eastern Pewee (*Contopus virens*) with exceptions that the bird seemed gray, not olive, like the Eastern on the upperparts. The identification therefore is based almost entirely on the birds vocalizations. Since I am familiar with the Western Pewee's habits and calls, I have seen the bird in Wyoming, Colorado and South Dakota, it is my firm belief that the identification is correct and a first for Iowa.

Why this species would occur in central Iowa is anybody's guess, it is known to breed as far east as central South Dakota along the Missouri River, and Minnesota has recently added it to their state list when it was found breeding in the northwest part of that state in 1977.

Darwin Koenig made an attempt to locate the bird at Elm Lake on June 23 but had no luck in relocating the bird. The specific time and location of the sighting was at 12:00 to 12:12 p.m. on the n.e. parking lot of Elm Lake. -- JOE SCHAUFENBUEL, St. Lucas.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION  
OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

81-FV  
Approved by  
checklist committee  
1979  
TK

(1)

Species: Western Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) Number: 1

Location: Elm Lake, near Belmond, Wright County

Date: June 21, 1979 Time bird seen: 12:00 to 12:12 p.m.

Description: In size, shape and actions the bird was much like an Eastern Pewee (*Contopus virens*) with exceptions that the bird was slightly gray on the upper-parts and back. The lower mandible nearly lacked the yellow or orange associated with the Eastern Pewee. This color was confined to the basal area of the bill and was dull. Much of the plumage, including head, back, wings, rump, tail and sides, was grayish-olive, with a contrasting white throat, center of belly, under-tail coverts and two wing-bars. The bird had no eye-ring. In shape; slim, longer-tailed than the *Empidonax* genus, and larger than this tribe also.

Voice: The distinct buzzy, nasal call, described as a 'bree-zu', was heard at least thirty times while the bird was under observation. This is the only call the bird gave, it did not in any way resemble the Eastern's call.

Behavior: The bird acted aggressively, chasing and attacking two House Sparrows and a Common Flicker in king-bird fashion, then returning to a perch. Its selection of perches were dead limbs mid-way up in 50 foot Cottonwood trees. At first the bird seemed to be territorial but unmated. Later the pewee moved far from the area where it was first observed and became nonvocal, thus being lost from view, terminating observation. A search later that day and the next morning failed to locate the bird.

Habitat: The bird was found in a narrow grove of mature Cottonwood surrounding Elm Lake, the lake is in the midst of farmland with a small pasture on the north.

Distance: The bird was seen in flight and perched within distances of 25 feet.

Previous experience: I am very familiar with the Eastern Pewee and have seen the Western in three western states and am knowledgeable of its calls and habits.

Similar species: Eastern Phoebe is larger and wags its tail. *Empidonax* are smaller with shorter wings and tail. Confusion with the Eastern Pewee is certain if plumage is used. Subtle differences in plumage were noted in my observation of the Western Pewee, when compared to my experience with the Eastern Pewee. The throat appeared whiter and contrasted more with the breast and head than a Eastern, also, as mentioned before, the color of the upper-parts appeared more grayish and not as green. Since the call was heard at close range, and having seen the vocalizing bird as well as my familiarity with the Western Pewee's call I believe the identification totally on voice is a valid one.

No other observer saw the Western Pewee although several were informed of the occurrence, only one attempted to find the bird, that being Darwin Koenig.

Three books were consulted after the observation; Peterson's--A FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN BIRDS, Robbin's--BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, Pough's--AUDUBON LAND BIRD GUIDE.

Notes were taken at the time of observation and used to construct this documentation.

*Joe Schaufelbush*

July 5, 1979 St. Lucas, IA 52166