

Western Wood-Pewee
10 Aug 1989
Huron I., Des Moines Co., IA
P. Petersen
IBL 60:11, 15, 61:85

Record Number: 89-52
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Peter C. Petersen

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 15
Records Committee: IBL 61:86

VOTE: 7 NA

N-A: A hard document to accept based on hearing call only once.

N-A: Kaufman's new book (Advanced Birding, 1990) says "On current knowledge it is probably impossible to distinguish [the two wood-pewees] with certainty in the field by sight alone. Their songs are very distinctive, but other vocalizations may not be, and wood-pewees rarely give their full songs away from their breeding grounds." (p. 180). He goes on to comment that it is a misleading oversimplification to suppose that a wood-pewee with buzzy or harsh calls must be a Western. "Juvenile Eastern Wood-pewees, giving hoarse calls and looking darker than adults, may sometimes be misidentified as Westerns." He explains, "Juveniles of either species may give calls that are harsher or hoarser than any calls of adults." Since this bird was only heard to call once, there is really no support for this record in view of Kaufman's comments.

N-A: While there is evidently precedent for vagrancy by this species into the Midwest, including nesting in Minnesota and three records for Illinois, a number of these base the identification upon call. Kaufman (Advanced Birding, p. 183), however, casts serious doubt on the reliability of call in identifying vagrant Westerns, especially in fall when juvenile Easterns may be present.

N-A: The darkness of this individual very slight makes the description favor the Western Pewee. The song also is described correctly according to the field guides. I have a lot of trouble accepting this sighting based on one song call even though it was by a very experienced listener who would be listening for a Western Pewee. I think we need to discuss criteria as a committee before I can vote to accept this bird.

N-A: This record presents quite a problem. This would appear to be an extralimital migrant if it is indeed a Western Wood-Pewee, with only one other early to mid summer record for Iowa (June 21) on the western side of the state. Peterson states that the bird had whitish wing-bars which would make it an adult at that time of the year. Plumage should be showing a lot of feather wear this late in the year. An immature would have some buff in the feather edging and less feather wear. As migration gets underway most passerines begin to lose their full singing voice and the sharpness tends to drop off and some individuals tend to become more plaintive and harsher as migration passes. As

far as I know this happens to most or all passerines that winter in the tropics or at least south of the United States. On their wintering grounds these birds are almost completely silent until they begin their northward migration in the spring. I do not know how many times the prior record of this species sang when documented but with only one (possibly time influenced Eastern migration) call given this would be a difficult record for me to vote to accept. Advanced Birding by Kenn Kaufman, 1990, indicates that with a lot of variability in voice it can be difficult to prove, by a mere description, that you have heard the full song of either species of wood-pewees outside its normal range. Singing vagrant wood-pewees should be tape-recorded it at all possible. I therefore vote not to accept this record.

N-A: This very likely may have been a Western Wood-Pewee, but I feel that more songs than one would have helped establish this song beyond doubt. Eastern Wood-Pewees have sung some unlikely songs to me on occasion.

N-A: Call heard, but because call "attracted attention to bird", I am not convinced bird described gave the call described. Described call could have been from an Empidonax, or even a phoebe. Date is questionable for a vagrant, but not a major problem. Also, see Kaufmann p. 182-183.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-52

What species? Western Wood Pewee How many? 1

Location? Huron Island, Des Moines Co. IA

Type of Habitat? ~~Wetland~~ Forest Clearing

When? date(s): Aug. 10, 1989 time: 7:55 to 8:00 AM CST

Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd, Davenport, IA 52801

Others with you: —

Others before or after you: —

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Medium sized Flycatcher, sitting upright, occasionally flying after insects. Head, back & tail dark gray, wing dark gray except for 2 whitish wing-bars, Below whitish except for gray on sides of breast. Legs black, bill black above, yellowish below. Call harsh, 3-syllables - Feeer-ur-reet, which I noted — — in my field notes. It was given only once and was what called my attention to the bird. Eastern Wood-Pewees had been seen and heard earlier in the day on this survey of breeding birds of these cut areas. This call was strikingly different from those of Easterns.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Eastern Wood-Pewee looks almost exactly like the Western, but the Western seemed a bit darker on the sides. The call of the Eastern is a clear whistle, totally different from this call. I spent an extra five minutes in an attempt to hear a second call from the Western but it flew away and ^{did not call again.}

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? —
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Sun behind observer, clear sky, bird est. at 30 m. distance
Used 10x40 Zeiss binocs

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen & heard thousands of Eastern and dozens of Western Wood Pewee

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 5 min. this form completed? 6 hrs.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).