

First United States record of Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher (*Empidonomus aurantioatrocristatus*) from Louisiana

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Figures 1, 2. These images of the Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher at Peveto Beach Woods, Cameron Parish, Louisiana 3 June 2008 were taken just prior to its collection. The blackish crown and auriculars, contrasting against the gray supercilium and underparts, are features typical of no other North American flycatcher. Photographs by Paul Conover.

Abstract

This paper documents a record of Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher (*Empidonomus aurantioatrocristatus*) from Cameron Parish, Louisiana on 3 June 2008. The record, documented with photographs and a specimen, is the first for the United States and second for North America.

Field encounter

On 3 June 2008, the authors were surveying birds in Cameron Parish in southwestern Louisiana. Shortly before noon we entered an area east of Johnsons Bayou known as Peveto Beach Woods, a once extensive coastal chenier that is now much degraded, except for the nearby Baton Rouge Audubon Society sanc-

tuary property. Almost immediately, we observed a small bird fly up and perch on a bare limb of a Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*), about 25 m distant and about 2.5 m above ground. From its flight, we suspected that it was a tyrant flycatcher, although it appeared to be smaller than a Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crini-*

tus), the smallest summer resident flycatcher expected in the immediate area. Upon observing the bird perched, we were initially perplexed, because its plumage did not match that of any expected species. The bird was about the size of an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). It was a light or medium gray beneath, with a slight yellowish wash to the vent and undertail coverts, and slightly darker gray-brown back and wing coverts. The face was the same gray as the underparts, with a dusky blackish patch from the lores through the eye and back to the auriculars. This was bordered above by a gray superciliary. The crown appeared to be black or blackish. The bill and legs appeared dark, as did the eye. Myers suspected that the bird was an austral migrant Neotropical tyrannid, and his suspicion was enhanced by brief glimpses of what appeared to be yellow in the center of the bird's crown.

Although we were uncertain of the identification, we realized the importance of the record. Possessing the necessary permits, we decided to collect the bird. Conover photographed the bird while Myers prepared to collect it. The bird flew closer to us and sally-hovered near a branch of Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*). We could not determine if the foraging flight was successful. The bird returned to its original perch. As Myers moved into position to collect the bird, it flew out of sight into nearby trees, but Conover soon relocated the bird and collected it. With specimen in hand, Myers became more confident of the specimen's identity but could not recall the entire proper name. Conover telephoned the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science (LSUMNS) and spoke with Bird Collection Manager Steven W. Cardiff. Conover described the specimen meticulously and conveyed our suspicions about its identity. Cardiff, with specimens to compare to our descriptions, confirmed that it sounded like a Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher (*Empidonomus aurantioatrocristatus*; sometimes placed in the monotypic genus *Griseotyrannus*). We arranged to deliver the specimen to the LSUMNS later that afternoon.

While en route to the LSUMNS, Conover telephoned David P. Muth and John Conover. According to their Internet searches, a photographically documented Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher in central Panama in December 2007 represented the sole record outside South America (Jones and Komar 2008).

Upon our arrival at the LSUMNS in Baton Rouge, our specimen was examined and its identification confirmed. Donna L. Dittmann immediately prepared the specimen as a study skin (LSUMNS catalog No. 180361) and internally sexed the bird as a male (left testis 2 x 1 mm), and aged the bird as an adult (skull completely ossified, Bursa of Fabricius absent). The bird weighed 31.8 grams and was record-

ed as having heavy fat (thus suggesting that the bird was in migratory condition and perhaps about to undertake a major flight). The outer primaries were fully notched, and no wing, tail, or body molt was noted; the plumage was very worn. There were no obvious abnormalities. Soft part colors were recorded as: iris dark brown; maxilla, tarsi, feet black; mandible horn at base blending to black distally. The specimen matches in size and color the LSUMNS series of >50 study skins of the nominate subspecies, although no specimens of *E. a. pallidiventris*, the presumably sedentary subspecies of eastern Brazil (Fitzpatrick 2004), were available for direct comparison. Tissue samples were deposited in the LSUMNS Collection of Genetic Resources (catalog No. B-62424), and stomach contents (insect parts) were saved, as was a partial skeleton.

Discussion

The breeding range of Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher extends from northern and eastern Bolivia to interior Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and northern and central Argentina; some populations migrate northward for the austral winter to Amazonia, as far north as eastern Ecuador, southeastern Colombia, and western Amazonian Brazil (Ridgely and Tudor 1994). It is accidental north of the Orinoco River, with the previous northernmost record a February 1950 specimen from the coastal state of Aragua in Venezuela (Hilty 2003). The December 2007 record from Cerro Azul, Panama, although from a more southerly latitude than the Aragua record, represents the only other record from outside of South America (Jones and Komar 2008). There are no prior records from the United States (A.O.U. 1998).

Vagrant austral migrants provide a small but remarkable addition to the avifauna of the United States. Probably the best-known example is the Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*), which strays annually to the United States. Although North American sightings of Fork-tailed Flycatcher from the United States and Canada have been reported across the continent, the majority of records have come from states and provinces along the Atlantic coast. This is not surprising, because central Venezuela, for example, is roughly on the same longitude as eastern Maine. Vagrant austral migrants are thought to be either overshoots or wrong-way migrants, and Lockwood (1999) described two seasonal peaks for the occurrence of Fork-tailed Flycatcher in the United States and Canada, with peaks mirroring the typical migration periods of the migratory South American subspecies. For the southeastern and south-central United States, the spring peak (mid-April to mid-July) is slightly higher than the fall peak and is thought by Lockwood to represent austral migrants overshooting their wintering grounds.

Given the early June date of our record of *E. aurantioatrocristatus*, perhaps it also pertains to such an instance of an overshoot.

The genus *Empidonomus* is otherwise represented on the United States checklist by a handful of records of another South American austral migrant Variegated Flycatcher, (*Empidonomus varius*). The most widely accepted United States records for Variegated Flycatcher are a November 1977 record from Maine, a May 1983 record from Tennessee (A.O.U. 1998), and a recent extraordinary record from the state of Washington in September 2008 (Mlodinow and Irons 2009).

At the November 2008 annual meeting of the Louisiana Bird Records Committee, the specimen and written reports associated with the present record were examined and evaluated, and Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher was added to the official Louisiana state list (Dittmann 2008).

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