



PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE

2469 Hammertown Road
Narvon, Pennsylvania 17555-9726

9 June 1994

Prof. Ned K. Johnson
Curator of Birds
Museum of Vertebrate Zoology
2593 Life Sciences Building
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Professor Johnson,

I am writing to you concerning the Hammond's Flycatcher which was collected by Don Heintzelman in Lehigh County, PA in December 1966. The specimen was sent to you for identification, resulting in the enclosed letter back to Mr. Heintzelman and his subsequent note in Auk Vol. 85:p 512.

The P.O.R.C. is responsible for compiling and updating the Official List of PA Birds and for determining the veracity of all records of rarities in PA. The first revision of the Official List is due to be published in Pennsylvania Birds in 1995. We would very much like to include the Hammond's Flycatcher in this list. We would therefore be extremely interested in some further detail on your identification of this bird, in particular how other species were eliminated by the measurements taken. This documentation would then be circulated around P.O.R.C. members and the record voted on.

We would be extremely grateful for this added information and would like to thank you in anticipation of your reply.

Sincerely,

Ed Kwater

Ed Kwater
Chairman

cc: P.O.R.C. file

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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

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July 14, 1994

Mr. Ed Kwater
Chairman
Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee
2469 Hammertown Road
Narvon, Pennsylvania 17555-9726

Dear Mr. Kwater,

Thank you for your letter of 9 June 1994, which arrived during my absence while on a field trip of almost two months duration.

Yes, I recall examining the specimen of Empidonax in question. But I do not recall it clearly; after all it has been over one-quarter century! Thus, I must refer to the contents of my letter of which you have kindly sent a copy. As I state in the letter of October 25, 1967, because of deficiencies in the specimen it would be impossible to conclude from measurements alone that the bird was E. hammondi. Nonetheless, as I stated, both color and size and shape of the bill were typical of hammondi and these features are important because they would distinguish hammondi from all Eastern species of the genus and from all Western species except for some individuals of E. oberholseri in certain plumages. If I stated then that I was convinced that the specimen was hammondi, based on the information available then, that conclusion must stand. I will not be able to take the case any further because there is no additional information.

Please realize that I am extremely conservative when it comes to identifications in this genus. If I had had any doubts concerning the identity of this bird I would not have stated so emphatically that it was hammondi. It would also be useful to accept the fact that sibling species of birds do not evolve for the purpose of identification by either systematists or birders. From the information we have it is safe to state that the bird is a Hammond's Flycatcher. I am also sending a copy of my 1963 monograph that goes into great detail on matters such as wing shape and typical values to be obtained when measuring wing feathers and other features.

Before too long, laboratory techniques will be available for the routine identification of problematical specimens (they are already available [mtDNA direct sequencing] but they are very expensive and too time-consuming to be applied routinely to bits of skin or feathers). In the meantime you will have no choice but to trust the opinions of those who have spent years working with these difficult birds. If I have not made a convincing case you certainly have the option of excluding the record from your list, a mistake I would think because then future workers would overlook a specimen (vastly more valuable than any sight record despite its poor condition) of great interest, one that is probably (but not certainly) correctly identified.

Sincerely,

Ned K. Johnson

Ned K. Johnson
Curator in Ornithology &
Professor of Integrative Biology

Auk 1968 535-01-1996

***Empidonax hammondi* in Pennsylvania.**—On 23 December 1966 Edward Reed and I were birding near Schnecksville, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. As we climbed a steep hillside covered with wet snow 6 to 7 inches deep, a small nondescript bird flew from a clump of dead vascular plants and landed momentarily on a low shrub about 30 feet in front of us. We were unable to identify the bird and I collected it.

The bird appeared to be an *Empidonax* flycatcher and when prepared as a study skin by Richard Taylor, it proved to be a female. Its mouth lining was orange. The wings and tail were extensively damaged by shot. As I was unable to identify the bird with the key presented by Phillips, Howe, and Lanyon (*Bird-Banding*, 37: 153–171, 1966), I sent the specimen for identification to Ned K. Johnson of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at Berkeley. His letter of 25 October 1967 points out that the bird's color and the size and shape of its bill are "reasonable" for a December specimen of *Empidonax hammondi*. Although the tail could not be measured because of the damage sustained when the bird was collected, the two remaining rectrices are nevertheless of the juvenile generation. "Hence this bird would be aged as an immature, or as a first-winter individual."

"From what I could reconstruct of the right wing, I took the measurements as follows of primaries 7 through 4: primary 7, 66.0 mm; primary 6, 62.0 mm; primary 5, 57.8 mm; and primary 4, 54.6 mm. The only primary available from the left wing is number 10 and I measure it as 60.1 mm; this is a bit dubious because the feather has been creased and is bent out of line." Measurements were of the chord of the arc made by the unflattened wing. Johnson concluded that the bird is a typical female Hammond's Flycatcher. The specimen is now in the collection of the William Penn Memorial Museum.

The Pennsylvania specimen of *E. hammondi* thus confirms the prediction of Phillips *et al.* (*loc. cit.*) that exceptionally late small flycatchers in the northeastern United States may include some western species. According to the A.O.U. Check-list (Fifth edit., 1957) the presence of *E. hammondi* in eastern North America is unprecedented. In Colorado, Bailey and Niedrach (*Birds of Colorado*, Denver, Denver Mus. Nat. Hist., 1965: 526) have recorded this species as late as 19 September, and in Oklahoma, Sutton (*Oklahoma Birds*, Norman, Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1967: 345–346) records the species as a transient occurring from 18 September to 2 October. In Texas, Wolfe (*Check-list of the birds of Texas*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Intelligencer Printing Co., 1956: 47) records the species as a migrant in spring and fall in the southwestern part of the state. Lowery (*Louisiana Birds*, revised second edit., Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1960: 365) lists one record of *hammondi* for Louisiana, a bird collected by Brooke Meanley 17 January 1957. The Pennsylvania specimen not only extends the extra-limital occurrence of *E. hammondi* many hundreds of miles eastward but adds a new species to the Pennsylvania avifauna. The date is also exceedingly late for any *Empidonax* flycatcher to occur in the east, although Bull (*Birds of the New York area*, New York, Harper & Row, 1964: 301) records sight observations of an *Empidonax* flycatcher at New Rochelle, New York, 21 and 25 December 1940 that could not be collected for specific identification. Finally Forbush (*Birds of Massachusetts and other New England states*, vol. 2, Norwood, Massachusetts, Norwood Press, 1927: 351) records *E. flaviventris* in Massachusetts as late as 6 December, and Phillips *et al.* (*loc. cit.*) state that *E. minimus* winters casually in the southeastern United States.

My appreciation is extended to Ned K. Johnson for identification of the specimen and to Kenneth C. Parkes for reading and suggesting changes in the manuscript.—DONALD S. HEINTZELMAN, *Natural Science Section, William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17108.*

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*)

Date of Sighting: 23 December 1966 to 23 December 1966

Location: SCHNECKSVILLE

County: LEHIGH

Observer(s): Donald Heintzelman, Edward Reed

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Nick Pulcinella

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: Yes

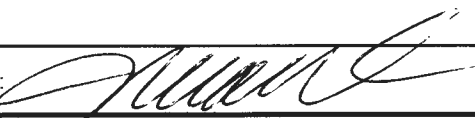
Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead	X							
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes	X							
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald <i>R. Leberman</i>				X				
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	3			3	1			
DECISION				X				

Comments: Specimen in State Museum, Harrisburg, PA

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Signature (Secretary):



Date:

11/20/01