

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

28 February 2003

Ray and Marlene Miller
214 Pontiac St.
Lester, PA 19029-1623

Dear Ray and Marlene,

Thank you for submitting documentation of the Hammond's Flycatcher that you banded on 14 May 2000 at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. After careful review, the Committee has voted not to accept this record.

The Committee's vote was one in favor of acceptance and six not in favor. The majority of members placed it in Category IV-B as "a record for which there exists insufficient evidence for evaluation."

The member who favored approval of the record considered that the combination of measurements that you provided was sufficient to eliminate other *Empidonax* species, but the other members felt that the description, even including the measurements, did not quite rule out other species conclusively. I am enclosing my analysis of the record so that you can see my personal line of thought.

Let me emphasize that our decision does not imply that the bird was not a Hammond's Flycatcher, but simply that the Committee felt that such a rarity requires more unequivocal evidence. We hope that our non-acceptance in this case will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities you find.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:
Paul Hess, Chair

Record No. 535-01-2000

Comments on Hammond's Flycatcher record #535-01-2000 -- Paul Hess

I believe that this was probably a Hammond's based upon the measurements given, but a great deal of additional information is necessary for a first accepted state record.

The description consists of only six items, none diagnostic from similar species. In fact two items among the six concern me: 1. "a broad gray band across the breast," which later is termed "the pretty prominent gray band across the breast"; in spring Hammond's has a grayish-*olive* tint to the breast (Pyle 1997). 2. "buffy wing bars"; in spring Hammond's wing bars should be dull white (Kaufman 1990).

The banders do not tell how this bird's characters differed from other *Empidonax*. In one important item, they say the underside of the bill "removed all doubt" – but they do not describe it.

For such a rarity the description must especially eliminate Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) and Least Flycatcher (*E. minimus*), and. Zimmer (2000) includes Gray Flycatcher (*E. wrightii*) on the list. In addition, Howell and Webb (1995) suggest that Pine Flycatcher (*E. affinis*) should be separated, but I believe it can be eliminated at the outset because it has never been confirmed north of Mexico even in the southwestern U.S. (AOU 1998). In addition, the Pennsylvania bird's tail length of 54 mm is much shorter than the *affinis* range of 57.1 to 69.1 reported by Johnson (1963).

In the absence of more plumage detail, we can base a judgment only on four measurements given: wing chord, tail length, bill length, and bill width. Following are the ranges (mm) from Pyle 1997 compared with the Pennsylvania bird:

	<u>Hammond's</u>	<u>Dusky</u>	<u>Gray</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>PA bird</u>
Wing chord:	62-75	61-73	63-76	56-67	70
Tail:	52-62	57-68	55-66	49-61	54
Bill from nares:	6.0-8.0	6.5-8.9	7.6-10.4	6.3-8.4	6.6
Bill width:	4.0-4.6	4.2-5.3	4.4-5.8	4.4-5.1	4.1

The Pennsylvania bird fits all four measurement ranges of Hammond's, but only two ranges of Dusky and Least, and only one range of Gray.

That is indicative of Hammond's, but there is overlap among the various species. Johnson (1963) and Pyle (1997) emphasize that wing morphology, shown by differences in length between two feathers, should be used to separate Hammond's in the hand from other *Empidonax*. The differences (p=primary, s=secondary) are: p9-p5, p6-p10, longest p-p6, and longest p-longest s. Unfortunately we do not have any of those measurements.

Comments on Hammond's Flycatcher record #535-01-2000 -- page 2 -- Hess

REFERENCES:

AOU. 1998. *Check-list of North American Birds*. 7th edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington D.C.

Howell, S.N.G., and S. Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford UK.

Johnson, N.K. 1963. *Biosystematics of Sibling Species of Flycatchers in the Empidonax hammondii-oberholseri-wrightii Complex*. University of California Publications in Zoology 66 (2): 79-238. Univ. Calif. Press, Berkeley.

Kaufman, K. 1990. *A Field Guide to Advanced Birding*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Pyle, P. 1997. *Identification Guide to North American Birds*. Part 1. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, Calif.

Zimmer, K. J. 2000. *Birding in the American West*. Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, N.Y.

535-01-2000

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax hammondi*)

Banded at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge

On Sunday, 05/14/00 at 7:30AM, while operating mist nets at our banding lane at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in Philadelphia, Pa., we captured a flycatcher. After taking measurements on the bird & carefully reviewing the Identification Guide to North American Birds and four field guides, we determined this was a Hammond's Flycatcher.

The measurements are: Wing Chord: 70 mm

Tail Length: 54 mm

Bill from Nares: 6.6 mm

Bill Width: 4.1 mm (at tip of Nares)

Careful comparison of the bill on this bird with Figure 144 page 219 of the Pyle book also verified our identification. It was a near perfect match.

Other Identifying marks used to identify this flycatcher were:

1. A drab grayish head with a narrow eye ring, which became slightly wider at the edge of the eye.
2. The back was drab gray with a slight olive tinge.
3. 2 buffy wing bars
4. The throat was a whitish gray and had a broad gray band across the breast, which faded into a whitish belly tinged with light yellow.
5. Black legs
6. #6 rectrices with slightly lighter outer web (very inconspicuous)

The capture of this bird occurred the day after a strong storm that had blown in from the west. We believe this may be only the second sighting of a Hammond's Flycatcher in the state of Pennsylvania.

Ray Miller 07380E
Marlene Miller 07380F
214 Pontiac St.
Lester, Pa.
19029-1623

I have to say this bird was pretty hard to identify for both of us because neither of us had ever seen one before. The first thing we noticed was the pretty prominent gray band across the breast and the small bill and knew immediately that it wasn't anything we had ever had in hand before. After comparing it in all the field guides we had, it still took the measurements and in particular the underside of the bill to confirm definitively what it was. If we had had to only use field guides, we would have only been able to say that it was one of the western flycatchers, but the bill width and underside of bill really removed all doubt. The field guides did however lead us to looking for some of the more inconspicuous field marks, like the almost almond shaped eye (I'm still not sure that wasn't from being stressed though) and the fact that #6 rectes were slightly lighter on the outer web.

We didn't have a camera that day, because it was very damp from the really bad storm we had the day before. In fact, we almost didn't go out to band that day because we didn't think there would have been much movement because of the storm.

Like I mentioned above, this bird was highly stressed and we were trying to be very careful not to handle it excessively. In fact I put it back in the holding cage twice before double checking my measurements. I must say it was the most fidgety flycatcher I've ever handled.

We didn't hear any call notes or songs from this bird, and I listened to my tapes when we got back just to make sure.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call (610 521-0749). I realize that this bird probably won't be confirmed as a Pennsylvania sighting because we don't have any pictures. I just have to say it was one of the better Mother's Day gifts nature has ever sent me. I'll probably never get to see another one.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 14 May 2000 to 14 May 2000

Location: JOHN HEINZ NWR

County: PHILADELPHIA

Observer(s): Raymond Miller, Marlene Miller

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Raymond Miller, Marlene Miller

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: ~~Video~~

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. Lakes J. Stanley				X				
B. Reid					X			
R. Leberman P. Rodewald					X			
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			1	1	5			
DECISION					X			

Comments: 1/6/0

Signature (Secretary):

Date:

10/27/01