





547-01-1990

POCC

1412 Hawthorne Street
Natrona Heights, PA 15065
November 28, 1990

Dear Barb & Frank,

Thought I'd send this description of the flycatcher now, for whatever use it may be. Incidentally, Buffalo Ornithological Society requires documentation for any Great Crested reported after September 27.

Ruth Crawford and Suzanne Butcher, whose parents own the land, couldn't find the bird Nov. 24 & 25 and neither could some others. Ruth was unsuccessful again this morning. Apparently our Nov. 20 sighting was the last date.

I'll be shocked if anyone feels it's an Ash-throated, but maybe there's an Ash-throated population with brighter-than-average coloration and a long "e-e" call. Or maybe Ash-throated can look this bright just after the fall molt. John Bull certainly thinks it's a tough call. I guess there's still hope. Margaret mentioned that you sent photos to Kenn Kaufman. The answer will probably be easy for him.

The thin whitish outer margins on the primaries and secondaries were new to me, and the guides don't seem to show any such characters. As I may have mentioned on the phone to Frank, Ken Parkes said such margins exist for a short time after the fall molt and quickly wear away. Interesting! It's amazing how much we miss without seeing some of these neo-tropical winterers outside the breeding season.

Barb Dean is going to send her photos as soon as she gets them, though she sounded a little doubtful about how much they'll show. I also asked Bob Leberman to research his Western Pa. Great Crested late-date for me. I expect it will be around the Oct. 7 date you mentioned finding.

Naturally I'm eager to hear what the experts think about the ID. Please let me know right away.

It was great to meet you after all this time. Your enthusiasm is infectious, and I hope it won't be too long before I can share it again -- next time for a real rarity, if this does turn out to be Great Crested.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Felt

BIRD: *Myiarchus* flycatcher (sp.)

DATE: November 20, 1990

LOCALITY: Slippery Rock Township, Butler County

OBSERVER REPORTING: Paul Hess, 1412 Hawthorne St.,
Natrona Heights, PA 15065. Phone (412) 226-2323.

OTHER OBSERVERS PRESENT: Barbara Haas, Frank Haas, Margaret
Higbee, Joyce Hoffmann, Gloria Lamer, Georgette Syster, John
Salvetti.

TIME OF OBSERVATION: 12:15 to 1:30 p.m.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: Bright, direct sunlight from behind us;
bird viewed in both bright sunlight and open shade.

OPTICS: 7 X 50 binoculars; scope at 15-40 power.

DISTANCE: estimated 20 yards (others saw it more closely);
bird at or near eye level.

BEHAVIOR: The bird perched on branches between 4 and 15 feet
up, low perches in much taller trees. Every minute or two it
moved to a new perch and sat still, apparently searching for
insects. Several times it flew to the ground, evidently
after spotting an insect, and appeared to forage for 30 sec.
to 1 min. among the low weeds. After over an hour of this
methodical activity within an area perhaps only 10 yards
wide, the bird flew about 100 yards away and could not be
relocated. No aerial flycatching was observed; temperatures
were in the 40s, and the chilly damp air probably precluded
flying insects.

HABITAT: Farmland. The bird stayed at the deciduous
woodland edge of an old soybean field, confining its apparent
search and forays for food to short weeds or grasses at the
immediate edge of the field.

DESCRIPTION: It was obviously a *Myiarchus* flycatcher.

- * Crown dark olive-brown, with rather depressed crest.

- * Back olive, with a definitely greenish rather than
brownish tint.

- * Wings (at rest):

- Outer webs of primaries and secondaries dark brown
narrowly margined with whitish (inner webs were not
visible at rest, nor did I see them well in flight)

- Tertiaries rich rufous, making a conspicuous small
bright patch of rufous on the inner wing;

- Greater and median coverts brown, edged and tipped
with yellowish white creating two buffy wing bars;

- Lesser coverts dark brown, narrowly tipped in dull
white, creating a third short "bar" distinctly
whitish in contrast to the buff of the main bars.

- * Rump and upper tail coverts brownish olive.

- * Tail above -- middle feathers brown; other retrices, outer webs brown and inner webs rufous. (Inner webs were hidden when the bird was perched, and I saw the rufous from above only briefly during short flights.)
- * Tail below -- My note on the inner webs, which were visible from below, is "light rufous all the way down." However, I may have been too distant for good detail because I understand photos appear to show some brown at the tips. I did not see this.
- * Sides of head and neck rich medium gray, shading rather abruptly to very light gray, or grayish white, in the loreal region and on the chin just below the bill. The eye was dark, and I detected no eye ring.
- * Throat and breast medium gray, slightly lighter than side of head but in my view not with a pale washed-out appearance even in bright sun.
- * Belly, flanks and undertail coverts bright yellow, again with no pale or washed-out appearance.
- * Bill rather large and heavy-looking; all black, or nearly so. Under bright sun a tiny light-colored (horn or tan) area appeared at the very base of the lower mandible, but this was not evident when the bird was in shade and may have been some sort of reflection in the sun's glare.
- * Legs and feet black.

VOICE: One series of three or four rather loud "wheep" calls was heard at 50 yards. These sounded much like the calls of Great Crested, though slightly less ringing and resonant, and perhaps with less rise at the end than that species' familiar nesting-season wheeps.

COMMENTS: I would call this a Great Crested rather than Ash-throated based on: its robust shape (Ash-throated thinner); rich gray side of head and medium gray throat and breast (Ash-throated paler); bright yellow belly and flanks (Ash-throated more delicate or washed out); and loud "long e-e" in the call (no Ash-throated call on my recordings shows a clear "e-e"). One thing intriguing was the rather depressed crest, noticeably less erect than typical Great Crested. This, like brown tips on the inner webs of the tail and the black bill, might point to Ash-throated.

I would also separate it from Brown-crested (Wied's) after discussion with Ken Parkes at Carnegie Museum, based on: richness of the gray on face and breast; brightness of yellow on the breast; and the call. (Though the recording includes a Brown-crested call somewhat resembling the bird's, this surprised Parkes who felt the "whe-e-p" of Great Crested and shorter notes of Brown-crested are distinctive.)

EXPERIENCE WITH *MYIARCHUS* SPECIES:

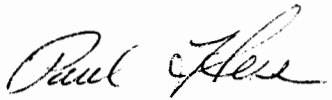
I see and hear Great Crested in good numbers yearly.

Ash-throated was familiar to me as a youngster and teen-ager, common in the San Bernardino Mountain foothills in southern California where I often camped. Though that was 35 years ago, I recall a slimmer bird, not very "pretty," whose grays and yellows were more like the light-ish Western Kingbird than the dark-ish Cassin's Kingbird. When I saw my first Great Crested after moving east, I marveled at how brightly colorful it was, compared to Ash-throated. This bird had that richly colored appearance.

With Brown-crested I have no experience and can make no judgment other than Parkes' suggestion that my description of the rich tones of grays and yellows, as well as the call, again indicate Great Crested.

CONCLUSION:

My observation has a major gap in detail if photos show brown tips on the inner webs of the retrices. If this is indeed diagnostic for Ash-throated, I should leave my opinion of Great Crested tentative and call the bird *Myiarchus* (sp.).



Paul Hess
November 22, 1990
(described from notes
written at the scene
November 20)

FOR C

Notes on *Myriarchus* flycatcher in Butler County 11/20/90

The following are field notes taken that day (written up 11/29/90):

Bill - all dark, with only a hint of color (pale yellow) at the very base.

Back color - very olive

Throat - gray; the white from the throat went up to the eyes and in front of the eyes.

Belly - lemony yellow

Breast - gray

Head cap - a bit darker than the rest of the head.

What limited view I had of the undertail coverts, they appeared pale.

Secondaries - edged in white but rufous wing coverts buffier than reverse coverts above.

Underside color of tail appeared to have light edging all the way down.

Undertail coverts - yellow.

Rufous edged primaries, but browner color.

Two wingbars, buffy.

Cheek markings - grayer than olive of head; somewhat pronounced.

The bird never fanned its tail while facing away from us; only when it took off and it was impossible to see if there was any dark "hook."



force

28 November 1990

THE CARNEGIE

MUSEUM OF
NATURAL HISTORY

Barbara M. Haas
2459 Hammertown Road
Narvon, Pennsylvania 17555-9726

Dear Barb:

I like mysteries so much that I habitually follow up on them way out of sequence in my accumulated correspondence. This is actually the second mystery in as many days; I just wrote Kathy Klimkiewicz about a strange bird that had been photographed and banded as a SY Black-headed Grosbeak in Illinois in May 1986. We'll never know for sure what that bird was, as the slides didn't match anything in our 7 trays of Black-headed and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. I won't go into details, but the best bet is that it was a SY male hybrid, and of course these two do hybridize extensively where their ranges meet, and the hybrids are very variable.

I have studied the photographs of North American Myiarchus in the photographically illustrated field guides, and then looked carefully at our series of specimens. We didn't have November specimens, as it happens, but did have October and/or December specimens of all pertinent species. Most of the important characters, however, are independent of season.

The first thing that needs to be said is that the photographs are deceptive. Colleagues that have examined them with me agree that in most of the photographs, the bright harsh winter sunlight directly on the bird has "bleached" out the bird's true colors, making (especially) the underparts look paler than they actually were. It is thus difficult to determine what the actual intensity of the gray and yellow of the underparts was.

In any case, the Ash-throated Flycatcher can be eliminated immediately. The transition between yellow and gray takes place substantially farther down on the bird in that species than in the other two candidates, the Great Crested and the Brown-crested, and the photograph shows this transition too high up on the bird for an Ash-throated. Even better is the fact that, as clearly shown in several of the photographs, the rufous in the tail extends to the tip, whereas in adult Ash-throated Flycatchers the tip is brown. This is barely visible in the plate in the new western Peterson guide, but is properly featured in the National Geographic guide. That guide shows the "juvenile" tail of the Ash-throated as lacking the brown tail tip. The painting, in fact, shows too much brown in the "juvenile" tail; it is solid rufous except for a very narrow brown

shaft-streak. The text states that this "juvenile" tail is "brief" and that is certainly the case. Bent says rather tentatively that young Ash-throated Flycatchers have a "post-juvenal" (=1st prebasic) molt that does not include the tail, but the very detailed account of plumages and molts in Oberholser's "Birds of Texas" states flatly that the "post-juvenal molt" is complete. Our specimens agree with Oberholser's information. We have only two specimens of this species in full juvenal plumage, and these are the only ones that show the rufous tail. In two trays full of this species, no specimen that has molted out of juvenal body plumage has retained the juvenal tail; all have the brown-tipped adult-type tail pattern.

There are three good characters for judging whether the bird was a Great-crested or Brown-crested. Turning to the rectrices first, as (once again) correctly described and figured in the National Geographic Guide, in the Great Crested the shaft of the rectrix divides the brown from the rufous portion, whereas in the Brown-crested the brown crosses the shaft and occupies about 1/3 of the inner web. Once again Peterson figures but does not mention this. The other two characters have to do with the bill. That of the Brown-crested is whoppingly large; the difference between the two species is again shown better in the NG than in the RTP guide. Although not recognized by the AOU, there are two good subspecies of the Great Crested Flycatcher, and those from about Charleston, SC south along the coastal plain and into peninsular Florida have noticeably larger bills than northern and Appalachian birds, but still not as large as the Brown-crested. Finally, only the Great Crested has a conspicuous light area at the base of the lower mandible. This is pictured but not mentioned in the NG guide. Peterson, on the other hand, in one of his classic goofs, says in the text "note the golden lower mandible," but paints it as entirely dark!

In all of the above characters, the photographed bird clearly matches the Great Crested. The bill is small with a conspicuous light area at the base, and the shaft of the rectrices clearly separates the brown and rufous areas. It's too bad the bird wasn't something more exciting for Pennsylvania, but as a late Myiarchus it certainly had to be checked out. My congratulations to Frank for having secured photographs that confirm every diagnostic character!

Feel free to pass this information along to anyone interested.

Best regards,

Ken

Kenneth C. Parkes
Senior Curator of Birds

Record No.: 547-01-1990

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # / of

Species: **Great Crested Flycatcher**

Date of Sighting: **November 18-20, 1990**

Observer(s): **Barb Haas, Frank Haas, Paul Hess**

Date of Submission: **1990**

Submitted by: **Barb Haas, Frank Haas, Paul Hess**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Leberman	X						
G. McWilliams	X						
S. Santner	X						
P. Schwalbe		X					
TOTALS	6	1					
DECISION	X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

Barb Haas

Date:

8-15-91