

Photographic documentation of Philadelphia Vireo on Aruba

Field encounter

While surveying birds at Spanish Lagoon, Aruba (formerly Netherlands Antilles) on 13 January 2002, we located a Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) in the short scrub vegetation along the northwestern side of the Spanish Lagoon inlet. The bird responded to "pishing" sounds and flew in, giving typical vireo nasal scolding calls. The bird remained in sight for approximately 10–15 minutes as it moved about in the scrub, sometimes as close as five meters. Characteristic features recorded in the field included typical vireo bill, gray cap, uniform yellow underparts, and dark lores. Given the brightness and extent of yellow on the underparts of this bird, we suspect it was a bird in its first winter.

We were able to capture several photographs that show the identifying features of Philadelphia Vireo (Figures 1 and 2) using an Olympus D-460 digital camera through the objective of a pair of

Swarovski 10x40 EL binoculars. The bird was not relocated during subsequent visits to the site on 15 and 16 January 2002.

Identification

In North America, plumages of Philadelphia Vireo are typically contrasted with similar plumages of Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*) and Warbling Vireo (*V. gilvus*), its closest look-alikes (Kaufman 1990). The Aruba bird's stocky build and rather blunt and thick bill readily distinguished it from all *Vermivora* and other typical warblers, and the bird's nasal, whining call notes were in striking contrast to the high-pitched, short call notes of Tennessee Warbler (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

While migratory Warbling Vireos from North America occur only rarely as far south as Costa Rica (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989, Stiles and Skutch 1989), the species occurs as a rare fall transient in Cuba (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000) and has

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occurred as a vagrant to Jamaica (Raffaele et al. 1998), and it is a potential vagrant to the southern Caribbean Basin. The Aruba bird showed the strong lemon-yellow cast across the entire underparts—including the central upper breast and lower part of the throat—that is characteristic of Philadelphia Vireo, especially



Figures 1 and 2. Two views of a Philadelphia Vireo at Spanish Lagoon, Aruba, 13 January 2002. Photographs by Jeffrey V. Wells.

fall immatures (Kaufman 1990). This feature is distinctly different from the whitish breast and yellowish flanks shown by nominate-race Warbling Vireos (Kaufman 1990), as well as differing from the whitish or buffy-whitish underparts of individuals of the "swainsonii" subspecies group (Voelker and Rohwer 1998). In addition, the Aruba individual showed obvious dark lores, which are usually lacking or are reduced and paler in Warbling Vireo (Kaufman 1990). The bird's more round-headed appearance, which can be seen in the accompanying photographs, is also consistent with Philadelphia Vireo and stands in contrast to the flat-headed appearance of Warbling Vireo (Kaufman 1990).

The only remaining species with which Philadelphia Vireo could potentially be confused is Brown-capped Vireo (*V. leucophrys*), resident in Central and South America, which occurs in the coastal mountains of Venezuela (Ridgely and Tudor 1989) but which is presumably an unlikely vagrant to offshore islands, given its sedentary nature. The Brown-capped Vireo, like the Warbling Vireo with which it has been lumped by some authors, shows a whitish throat and chest with pale yellow restricted to lower underparts (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Brown-capped Vireo also lacks the obvious dark eyestripe (Howell and Webb 1995) and has a more flat-headed appearance—all characteristics that distinguished it from the Aruba bird. While it may be somewhat difficult to see in the photographs, the bird also had the grayish cap of Philadelphia Vireo rather than a brown cap, as in Brown-capped Vireo (Hilty and Brown 1986).

Discussion

Philadelphia Vireo regularly winters from southern Mexico south to western Panama (A.O.U. 1998, Ridgely and Gwynne 1989). The species has occurred rarely during the nonbreeding season in the Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, and Antigua (Raffaele et al. 1998). There are three records from Colombia (Ridgely and Tudor 1989), but none from neighboring Venezuela (Hilty 2003) or from any other South American country (Rodner et al. 2000, Ridgely and Tudor 1989). The species shows up annually as a vagrant in western North America (Sibley 2000) and has a minor record of vagrancy to western Europe as well (Beaman and Madge 1998).

These photographs provide the first photographic documentation of Philadelphia Vireo for Aruba; additionally, we have a sight record from April 2000 from

the neighboring island of Curaçao (Wells and Childs Wells 2001). The age of the Aruba individual, very probably in its first year, fits well with the pattern of passerine vagrancy, which is most prevalent in birds on their first migration (e.g., Veit 2000).

As islands are known to be migrant traps, it is perhaps also not completely surprising that we have found the species twice in two years in the "ABC Islands," despite the paucity of records from mainland South America. The island of Aruba lies some 30 km from the Paraguana Peninsula of northwestern Venezuela, leading us to speculate that Philadelphia Vireo is likely to occur at least occasionally in coastal regions of Venezuela.

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