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NOTES ON POSSIBLE PHILADELPHIA VIREO  
(Vireo philadelphicus)

Date: September 1, 1984 (10:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m.) Located on three different occasions with total viewing time approx. three minutes.

Location: Crow Valley Campground, Pawnee Nat. Grasslands, Briggsdale, Weld Co., Colo.

Observation conditions: (Weather) Generally overcast but bright. Observed bird moving in and about foliage of Chinese elm; at one time perched in open on dead limb for approx. 20-30 sec. and viewed with my back to the sun. (Distance from bird) Estimated at 25 to 30 feet. Used 8X40 Bushnell binoculars.

Habitat: Chinese elm, willow, cottonwood stand by dry streambed in shortgrass prairie region.

Behavior: Feeding from mid to treetop in smaller branches of Chinese elms. Compared to a warbler, it was sluggish or slow moving while in tree but moved from tree to tree quite often. Not necessarily secretive but difficult to observe and locate because of density of foliage.

General description: Besides behavior, determined to be a vireo because of bill size and shape: heavier and not as pointed as that of warblers present (Orange-crowned, Townsends, MacGillivray's and Wilson's).

Plumage: Clean pale yellow underparts from chin to undertail coverts (no streaks, blotches or color variations). Upperparts smooth dark grayish brown (Doug thought it had a greenish tinge). Crown more gray than brown but there were no sharp contrasts from the forehead to tip of tail. There were no discernable wing bars and the wings were approx. the same color as the back. There was a fairly wide off-white eyebrow line, not sharply defined, beginning at the bill and running over and to just behind the eye. Under the dark eye there was a bright white "eyelid" (like the lower half of a broken eye ring). There was a dusky (dark gray) smudge running from the lores through the eye to just behind the eye, outlined by the eyebrow and white lower "eyelid," which gave the bird a large-eyed appearance. Could not detect "black lores" as indicated in field guides, but the lores were dark.

Similar species: Also present in the area this day were a Solitary Vireo (*V. solitarius*) and Warbling Vireo (*V. gilvus*). The Solitary was fairly typical with a bright white spectacle and white wing bars. It was larger in size and heavier looking, with a larger bill.



Some of the field guides indicate that Bell's, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos may not show distinct wing bars in the fall. I think of Bell's (*V. bellii*) as being small and round in appearance and in my estimation more flitty than other vireos I have seen. Yellow-throated (*V. flavifrons*), according to the guides, has a heavy bill like a Solitary, and overall gives the impression of a heavy vireo; also would probably have some yellow on the face and forehead. I saw mature and immature White-eyed (*V. griseus*) in Florida; the immatures all showed medium to bright yellow foreheads. Guides say they should have yellow lores, spectacles or forehead (or all three). These three species would not show an eyebrow line according to my references.

More difficult to eliminate was Red-eyed (*V. olivaceus*) and Warbling (*V. gilvus*). I have seen Red-eyed Vireos in the fall with a yellowish wash on the underparts but I think of them as being larger in size and longer billed than this bird seemed to be. The eyebrow was not as defined as I recall in Red-eyed (which is usually sharply outlined) and there was no sharp contrast between the crown and back color.

We were able to compare the subject bird to a Warbling (*V. gilvus*) that was feeding in the same tree. We determined it to be a Warbling Vireo because of its very obscure facial pattern: only an indistinct light gray eyebrow, off-white lores; pale gray underparts that showed patches of yellowish gray on the flanks, belly and undertail coverts; back was medium gray; face lighter gray, throat ashy white; nape lighter than back; crown and forehead medium gray; diffuse medium gray through eye. There were no discernable wing bars or eyering.

Though the possible Philadelphia Vireo was approximately the same size as the Warbling, the Warbling looked more streamlined. The subject bird appeared to be thicker in the head, neck and breast area; looked somewhat stubbier than the Warbling.

None of the vireos was singing or calling.

Although we were certain because of bill shape and size, and behavior, that this bird was not a warbler, another possibility was a female/immature Black-throated Blue Warbler due to plumage similarities. These would not show as much contrast between upper and underparts; the eyebrow stripe would be narrower.

Doug Ward also saw this bird. Shortly after we first saw it, we consulted both Robbins and Peterson. After finally viewing it, we wrote notes in the field (represented under "General Description". At home we checked other references such as Audubon Master Guides and Birds of Colorado. All references gave slightly different color descriptions than what we saw and described, but after putting it all together I'm fairly certain this was a Philadelphia Vireo.

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