Bull, John 1964, *Birds of the New York Area,* Harper and Row, New York.
Latham, Roy, Personal Communication, January 6, 1972.

John A. Black, Suffolk County Community College, 533 College Place, Seldon, N.Y. 11784

Possible decline of the Least Flycatcher in Northern Westchester County: This note is intended to alert observers to the possibility that the Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minima*) is declining as a breeding bird in northern Westchester County. It is based on rather limited observations in one locality and should not be interpreted as proof of such a decline, for it may indicate only a local or temporary phenomenon. However, in these times of rapid changes in environment and in populations of animals in nature, it seems important to maintain vigilance over bird populations and to report such changes as may seem significant.

Observations were carried out three miles east of Peekshill, New York, where from 1954–1957 and 1960 I had carefully censused breeding birds on a 24 acre study area. This study area comprised 40% wet second-growth woodland and 60% lawns, gardens, and residences. The plot was 800′ × 1200′, with the forest running lengthwise down the middle, providing a rather long forest-garden edge. This edge offered suitable breeding habitat for Least Flycatchers. In addition, I made other observations in an area of 360 acres (which included the study area), and casual observations in an adjacent area of woodland, marsh and old field, comprising about 1700 acres.

In the 5 seasons (1954–57 and 1960) the average number of territorial male Least Flycatchers found on the three plots was 2.2, 6.6, and 7.1. Because the coverage of the three plots was quite different, it would not be proper to reduce these figures to pairs/area. Of the total of 83 territorial males, the nest site was located for 34 pairs.

In 1970, during casual observations in these areas, I did not hear any Least Flycatchers, and in 1971 therefore, I devoted considerable time to looking for the species. I checked all of the previous nesting sites and heard only two individuals during the spring of 1971. When I revisited the location of these two birds, I did not encounter them, indicating that they may not have bred in the area. No Least Flycatchers were found on the 24 acre study area where a minimum of two pair had bred during the five initial census seasons.

It is still premature to report a definite decline of this species, but hopefully other observers will take the opportunity to look more closely at the status of the Least Flycatcher in coming seasons. The causes of the decline, if it is a real decline, are difficult to determine. From 1955 to 1969 the study area received weekly sprayings of various insecticides for mosquito control. Other species of insectivorous birds, except possibly the House Wren, (*Troglodytes aedon*) seem however, to have been present in normal numbers, in 1971. At least on the study area, there has been no habitat change noted in the 17 year period, and only slight changes have occurred in the two larger plots.

This apparent decline needs extensive study in the future, and similar data is needed for all species of birds. The usefulness of any bird census in providing a baseline for interpretation of unanticipated future population changes is amply demonstrated by this report. It is, of course, possible that my findings represent only a temporary local fluctuation, such as might be anticipated at the margin of a species breeding range, for the Least Flycatcher is at the southern limit of its range in southeastern New York. If significant, the cause of the change remains obscure, and in the absence of more data, further speculation at this time seems unwarranted.

Michael Gochfeld, Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York 10024