

ACADIAN FLYCATCHER ON LONG ISLAND

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ABSTRACT — Some history of the Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) on Long Island is discussed.

In the June, 1994, issue of *The Kingbird* (Vol. 44, No. 2) there is a note by Pat Lindsay and Tom Vezo about a probable breeding record of Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) on eastern Long Island. The history of this bird in New York is of interest and I would like to add some information.

In the nineteenth century, Acadian Flycatcher was a fairly common breeder in the lower Hudson Valley and on western Long Island; it was considered local and less common in Suffolk County. Eaton (1914) says that "Mr Roosevelt [Theodore] and Mr Howell found it fairly common in the vicinity of Oyster Bay, North-port and Wood Haven, Long Island; Mr Helme has taken two nests with eggs at Millers Pl in Suffolk County". Also, Roy Latham found it breeding at Gardiner's Island in 1906.

Near the beginning of the century, for unknown reasons, it began to disappear from Long Island and, in fact, from most of the northeast. Bull (1974) described its status as follows: "Formerly a local breeder; since 1900 has greatly decreased; now a rare migrant only; no definite breeding for over 45 years." There were no records between 1926 and 1972 when, as mentioned by Lindsay and Vezo, a pair attempted to nest in "suitable habitat" near Noyac (see Bull 1974).

In 1973, a pair was found incubating near Amenia, Dutchess County, for the first New York record in nearly 60 years (see Bull 1976). Other records followed including, in June, 1976, a breeding pair discovered by the undersigned in Maple Swamp near Flanders in the town of Southampton. In the following years, it became apparent that the species had recolonized Long Island with breeding stations concentrated in wet woods on the north shore and in similar situations on the east end (Maple Swamp and Noyac as well as parts of East Hampton and Gardiner's Island, all wet or mesic woodlands bordering the Peconic/Gardiner's estuarine system).

The New York State breeding bird atlas recorded (1980-1885) Acadian Flycatcher as 'confirmed' or 'probable' in 11 Long Island blocks, mostly in the eastern areas described above (Eaton 1988). Singing birds were widely observed in spring migration and well into June in many wooded and semiwooded locations during this period.

However, as suggested by Lindsay and Vezo, there has been a striking falloff in reports of this species since the late 1980s. The question posed is whether the mini-reinvasion of the '70s and early '80s has been reversed, leading once again to the disappearance of the species as a breeder in New York, or whether the species has simply fallen back, as is common after an initial range expansion, to more modest but sustainable population levels (the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, (*Polioptila caerulea*), provides an excellent example of this on Long Island). The nesting record cited by Lindsay and Vezo and several other recent observations suggest that the latter may indeed be the case but the evidence is far from conclusive.

Studies of historical record on Long Island show that there have been a number of southern species that bred on Long Island in the nineteenth century, disappeared in the early twentieth and then recaptured their New York breeding range in recent decades. Some of these have now spread far to the north and are well established on Long Island but others have barely entered our area and show the typical variations and fluctuations of species at the edge of their range.

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