

Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Very Rare

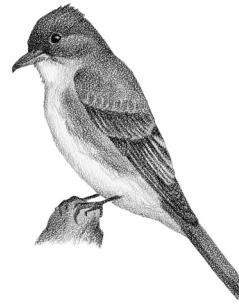
Habitat: Exposed or dead branches in the tops of trees

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is a denizen of the boreal forest far to our north. It nests mostly in upper New England, Canada, and parts of the Rocky Mountains. The entire population of this flycatcher is in serious decline, and research is currently underway to determine why. A small disjunct population of the Olive-sided Flycatcher is reported to nest or to have once nested in scattered areas of spruce-fir forest in the mountains of North Carolina and in parts of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Ornithologists believe that “prior to the 1930s it was more common and widespread in the Southern Appalachians.” Reports of breeding in North Carolina continued into the 1990s, but it appears no direct evidence of breeding has been obtained.

This bird is one of our larger flycatcher species, averaging about half an inch bigger than our most common flycatcher, the Eastern Phoebe. Its song is relatively easy to identify. Many birders interpret this song as *quick...THREE BEERS!* Ornithologists have described the Olive-sided Flycatcher as “one of the most tyrannical of the tyrant flycatchers,” because both the male and female birds mount an aggressive defense of their nest site.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is a very rare migrant in the Central Carolina region. There are six reports from Mecklenburg County, two from Catawba County, and one from Anson County. Two sightings are supported by photographs.

The first report for the region was submitted by Heathy Walker and Harriett Whitsett who discovered an Olive-sided Flycatcher in northern Mecklenburg County on May 11, 1989. The bird was perched in the top of a dead tree. Four of the five other Charlotte area sightings were observed along one of Mecklenburg County’s greenways. David Wright found an Olive-sided Flycatcher on September 21, 1991, in the woods along the Mallard Creek drainage basin. On September 7, 2003, a group of birders taking a butterfly walk at McAlpine Greenway were delighted to find an Olive-sided Flycatcher sitting in a snag just above the park’s stretching station. The group’s leader, Taylor Piephoff, spotted it and reported that, despite his many years of birding, it was the first he’d ever seen in the state. On August 17, 2005, John Bonestell reported finding an Olive-sided Flycatcher sitting on a branch in a very large, dead oak tree beside the parking lot at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge. The following year,



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several birders were able to observe an Olive-sided Flycatcher present at the Six Mile Creek Greenway on May 22–23, 2006. This bird was photographed by at least one birder. The most recent Charlotte report was of a bird found at the West Branch Nature Preserve on September 10, 2016. Rob Van Epps wrote:

Just had an Olive-sided Flycatcher at the viewing stand in West Branch Nature Preserve, Davidson, NC. Large dark flycatcher. White patches along both sides of rump visible. Bird was on top snag of a dead tree just to the right of the platform. It flew but would guess it’s still around—great habitat for this species.

There are three reports from this region from outside of Mecklenburg County. Dwayne Martin found an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Riverbend Park in Catawba County on September 6, 2003. He and Lori Owenby spotted a second one there on September 27, 2008. This bird was hawking insects in the parking lot. They watched it through a spotting scope and heard it calling as well. Mike McCloy photographed an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge on September 5, 2011. The bird was seen on the top of a large snag.

McCloy provided this observation:

Repeatedly came back to the same perch after hawking insects. Very upright posture; dark, robust head; large bill, dark undertail coverts, dark “vest” contrasting with white throat and belly; and extremely dark upperparts all evident in our prolonged scope views.

This is believed to be the first record of this species in Anson County.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.