

The First Record of White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) in British Columbia.

by Gary Davidson.

Introduction and Distribution

The White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) is a small passerine that is normally found in the southern and eastern parts of North America (Sibley 2003). Its breeding range is confined to the eastern one-third of the United States and extreme southern Canada (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). It includes eastern Texas, eastern Oklahoma, eastern Nebraska, most of Missouri and Illinois, and all states to the east, but not including Maine (Hopp *et al.* 1995). The normal winter range in continental North America is Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and the Gulf States west to Texas and eastern Mexico (Hopp *et al.* 1995).

In the Pacific Northwest, the White-eyed Vireo is an accidental visitor (Wahl *et al.* 2005). This paper documents the first provincial occurrence. Other western regional records include: one record for Alberta, a single bird was seen and photographed at Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park on May 21, 2012 (Koes and Taylor 2013); one Washington record, a singing male was observed at Vashon Island, July 11, 1981 (Tweit and Paulson 1994, Wahl *et al.* 2005, and Bill Tweit pers. comm.); There were no records in Oregon prior to 2006, (Marshall *et al.* 2006, OFO 2012); however one record since then, a single bird was observed in Harney Co., on June 9, 2009, (David Irons, pers. comm.)

There are three recognised subspecies in North America: the nominate subspecies of White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus griseus*) occurs throughout most of its range and is the only subspecies that is highly migratory (Hamilton *et al.* 2007), the subspecies (*Vireo griseus maynardi*) which is restricted to the Florida Keys (Hopp *et al.* 1995), and the subspecies (*Vireo griseus micrus*) which is found in Southern Texas (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The subspecies of Southern Texas looks similar to birds found in the Florida Keys, but is overall smaller in size (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Identification and Similar Species

In the context of British Columbia, the White-eyed Vireo, if seen well, doesn't have any similar looking species and should be easily identified by any level of observer.

Adult birds have a grayish-green forehead and crown with a distinct gray nape (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back is green and extends down to the rump (Sibley 2000). The medium and greater coverts are dark and have two distinct white wing bars (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The rest of the folded primaries and secondary feathers are edged in green with thin dark-centered feathers (Sibley 2000). There is a dark line from the base of the bill to the eye with a yellow line above that extends around the eye (Sibley 2000). This gives birds the look of having yellow spectacles (Sibley 2000). The eye is pale white (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is dark with gray limited to where the upper and lower mandibles meet (Sibley 2000). The throat is white with yellow across the chest and down the flanks (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The lower belly is white, and the undertail coverts are yellowish-white (Sibley 2000). The tail is not long

and is a greenish-yellow colour on the upperside (Sibley 2000). The legs and feet are gray (Sibley 2000).

First winter birds occur from July – February (Sibley 2000). In overall plumage, these birds are very similar to adults, but will often show paler grey heads, and some worn juvenile birds can become extremely pale gray headed during the month of August and September (Sibley 2000). All birds at this age have a dark brownish or grayish eye color that becomes paler like the adults after November and throughout the winter months (Hopp *et al.* 1995).

The song of the White-eyed Vireo is very rapid and nasal (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The song both begins and ends with a sharp “chick” (Sibley 2000). Then it is followed by a long, whining “tik-a-purrreeer-chik” or “chik-errr-topikerreerr-chik” (Sibley 2000). There can be many different variations of this song (Sibley 2000). The Call note is a harsh, “meer” that sounds level, but can also sound descending (Sibley 2000). Other call notes include a series of “rikrikrikrik rik rik rik rik” or a single rising “rik”(Sibley 2000).

Occurrence and Documentation

On December 1, 2014, an adult White-eyed Vireo was observed briefly in Kokanee Creek Provincial Park, about 17km east of Nelson on the West Arm of Kootenay Lake. The bird was foraging low in an area of woody shrubs adjacent to a small wetland. No photographs were obtained due to the brief appearance of the bird (G. Davidson pers. obs.). The following day, a search was made, but the bird was not relocated (P. Prappas pers. obs.). A further search on December 5, 2014, was successful and photos were obtained (P. Prappas pers. comm.). Further visits to Kokanee Provincial Park on December 5-6, 2014, were also successful (D. Kite pers. comm.). The bird was not reported again after that date. The bird was found to occasionally associate with local Black-capped Chickadees and was found to give brief call notes on occasion (G. Davidson pers. obs.).

The White-eyed Vireo is a casual to accidental species everywhere along the west coast of North America, including California. There are seventy-four accepted state records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). The majority of records occur in the spring when other south-eastern warblers occur as vagrants throughout much of western North America (Roberson 1980). The peak period for White-eyed Vireo occurrences has been from May 6 – June 30 accounting for 78% of state records (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). This is in sharp contrast to the fall period where there are only sixteen state records that have occurred from July 1 – October 31 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). There is only one winter record for the state, and this bird was found and photographed in Picacho State Recreation Area, Imperial County from January 9-19, 2009 (Tietz and McCaskie 2014). The handful of other west coast records fall into the spring and summer period, and fit well into the California timing of occurrence. Given that the recent sighting from British Columbia occurred in the winter, this makes this record all the more extraordinary. Based on this pattern of records it seems highly likely another White-eyed Vireo will make its way to British Columbia although the likelihood of another winter record seems remote.



Figures 1 & 2: Record #1: White-eyed Vireo adult at Kokanee Provincial Park on December 5, 2014. Photographs © Craig Sandvig (left photo) and Paul Prappas (right photo).



Figures 3 & 4: Record #1: White-eyed Vireo adult at Kokanee Provincial Park on December 6, 2014. Photographs © Derek Kite.

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