



Double-brooding Attempt by Pacific-slope Flycatcher on Vancouver Island, British Columbia

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The extent of double-brooding in Pacific-slope Flycatcher, especially in northern parts of its range is unclear. Double-brooding, producing a complete clutch of eggs after successfully rearing a first brood in the same nesting season, may increase reproductive output but there is considerable variation within and among species, and from year to year (Berger and Radabaugh 1968, Monroe et al. 2008, Mulvihill et al. 2009). Hann (1953) suggests that migratory species that remain during the breeding season in an area

for 20 to 22 weeks may attempt to rear more than one brood and are usually short-distance migrants. Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*; Figure 1) is considered a medium-distance migrant, but there are few studies of its nesting biology and instances of double-brooding are few (Lowther 2000). Raising two broods in a single year by this species has been reported in California (Williams 1942, Davis et al. 1963) and recently on Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) in British Columbia (Ainsley 1991).



Figure 1. Pacific-slope Flycatcher, a medium-distance migrant that primarily inhabits deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous forests in British Columbia, arrives on southern Vancouver Island in late April and early May, breeds in June and July, and departs in early September. *Photo by Mark Nyhof.*



Figure 2. Throughout its range in western North America, Pacific-slope Flycatcher frequently nests in artificial sites, including buildings. This nest was built under an awning on a deck in a townhouse (arrow). *Photo by Barbara Pomphrey, Sidney, BC. BC Photo 4016 (see Campbell and Stirling 1971).*

On the evening of 4 July 2012, Don and Barbara Pomphrey, owners of a unit in our townhouse complex in a wooded area (Figure 2) of North Saanich, British Columbia, informed me they had birds nesting above an awning in the back of their unit. They suspected they were flycatchers as they did not visit their seed feeder. The next morning I checked the site and found a pair of Pacific-slope Flycatchers. The flycatchers had built an untidy, mossy nest on top of the metal mechanism that operates the awning over the dining-room window, above the deck (Figure 3). One or two adults were feeding insects to two large nestlings that appeared almost ready to fledge, as they were exercising their wings. The Pomphreys often used their deck, as did their dog, and on sunny days they extended the awning for shade. By the night of 5 July or morning of 6 July the young had left the



Figure 3. The Pacific-slope Flycatcher nest is well supported from below and behind in the awning. *Photo by Barbara Pomphrey.*

nest. Early in the nesting process, Don had startled an unidentified “shiny, black bird” leaving the nest with an egg, which it dropped and broke on the deck.

On 12 July, six to seven days after the young fledged from the first nest, Don and Barbara noticed a Pacific-slope Flycatcher refurbishing the nest. It was assumed that the same adults were present although banding or identifiable plumage characteristics would have been necessary to confirm this. Also, the townhouse abuts onto a small mixed woodland that is less than the average size of a breeding territory of 2.5 ha reported by Ainsley (1991) for Pacific-slope Flycatcher. It is unlikely that two pairs would occupy the same territory.

On 21 July, I saw adults flying back and forth to the nest with food. On 24 July, carpenters started dismantling the deck to start a long-scheduled re-build and were aware of the active nest. They made every effort to disturb the birds as little as possible. On 12 August, I observed two nestlings being fed. Don and Barbara did not see the nestlings and last saw the adults about 16 August. It is not known whether young actually fledged.

The components of each segment of the breeding period of Pacific-slope Flycatcher add up to about 36 days, based on averages published by Davis et al. (1963) and Sakai (1988): nest building (30 May to 3 June), egg-laying (4 to 5 June), incubation (6 to 21 June), and fledging (22 June to 6 July). These dates fall within averages previously reported for nesting Pacific-slope Flycatchers in British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1997). Buildings and bridges accounted for 30% of 154 nest sites reported in British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1997), therefore, the North Saanich location is unusual for Vancouver Island. †

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About the Author

Barbara's first trip outside of the Americas very quickly morphed into a passion. She has now visited all seven continents, enjoying birds and other creatures and cultures, but finds new experiences at home can also be exciting.

