



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

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On 1 December 2014, we participated in the annual West Arm Waterfowl Count, a census initiated in 1974 that has been conducted almost annually over the ensuing 39 years (Arndt and Van Damme, 2014). The purpose of the survey is to monitor waterfowl populations of the West Arm of Kootenay Lake, between Nelson and Balfour, in south-eastern British Columbia during early winter. We covered the segment between the bridge over Highway 3A in Nelson east along the waterfront to Kokanee Creek Provincial Park. At about 1130 hr, we arrived at the park and walked along a wooded trail toward the lake shore. We heard a couple of Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*) calling and stopped to look at them. As we watched, a small bird moved in from our left, perched briefly, and clearly showed some yellow – too bright for an American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) in winter plumage. The bird immediately moved to a new location about three metres from our position. We all observed the bird for about three seconds through binoculars and knew immediately that it was a White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*). We were all familiar with the species because all of us had spent considerable time bird watching in the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas during winter where this species is common.

Almost as quickly as the bird had appeared, it disappeared. None of us saw it fly away. We had previously noticed this behavioural pattern while watching this vireo on its wintering ground in Texas. Numerous times we tried photographing the species before it seemed to disappear before our eyes.

The following morning, on 2 December, Paul, Craig Sandvig, and Danny Tyson returned to the site in an attempt to relocate and photograph the White-eyed Vireo. The bird was not found despite searching for more than four hours. On 4 December, Paul and Craig relocated and photographed the vireo (Figure 1). The bird was seen again on 5 December by Janice Arndt and 6 December by Derek Kite, when additional photographs were obtained (Figure 2). Despite additional searches by Paul and Peter McIver on 7 and 10 December, the bird was not seen again.



Figure 1. The White-eyed Vireo found in Kokanee Creek Park, a first for British Columbia, was a surprise since the species is normally present year-round in states bordering the Gulf of Mexico. *Photo by Paul Prappas, Kokanee Creek Park, BC, 4 December 2014. BC Photo 4103a; see Campbell and Stirling 1971).*



Figure 2. The White-eyed Vireo was present for at least six days in Kokanee Creek Park, BC. *Photo by Derek Kite, 5 December 2014. BC Photo 4103b.*

The normal winter range for the White-eyed Vireo in continental North America includes Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and the Gulf of Mexico states west to Texas and eastern Mexico (Hopp et al. 1995). There are no previous records for British Columbia (Campbell et. al. 2001, 2007). There is only one record for western Canada, a single bird seen and photographed at Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park, Alberta, on 21 May, 2012 (Koes and Taylor 2013). In the Pacific Northwest, there are only two records, one each from Washington and Oregon. A singing male was observed at Vashon Island, Washington, on 11 July 1981 (Tweit and Paulson 1994, Wahl et. al. 2005, Bill Tweit pers. comm.). In Oregon, there were no records prior to 2006 (Marshall et al. 2006). Since then one White-eyed Vireo was observed in Harney Co. on 9 June 2009 (David Irons, pers. comm.).

Across the southern United States, winter

habitat for White-eyed Vireo is variable but is mainly characterized by later stages of succession as well as secondary deciduous growth (Hopp et. al. 1995). The habitat the bird frequented in British Columbia was similar. It consisted of a fairly dense patch of riparian growth adjacent to a wetland near Kokanee Creek. The mixed woodland consisted of willow (*Salix* sp.), Douglas maple (*Acer glabrum*), black hawthorne (*Crataegus douglasii*), and various woody shrubs, including red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera* [sericea]) and common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) (Figure 3). The surrounding forest was a mixture of more mature coniferous and deciduous trees. Subsequent sightings were in similar habitat about 500 m from the original location (Figure 4).

The White-eyed Vireo at Kokanee Park is the first record for British Columbia and the seventh vireo species recorded in British Columbia. †



Figure 3. When first spotted, the White-eyed Vireo was foraging in a successional fairly dense patch of woodland vegetation with a variety of understorey shrubs, including red-osier dogwood and common snowberry. *Photo by Paul Prappas, Kokanee Creek Park, BC, 10 December 2014. BC Photo 4103c.*



Figure 4. The White-eyed Vireo frequented similar patches of habitat in Kokanee Park during its six-day residence. *Photo by Paul Prappas, Kokanee Creek Park, BC, 10 December 2014. BC Photo 4103d.*

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About the Authors

Gary is a retired high school mathematics teacher and has been a passionate birdwatcher since the late 1960s. After graduating from UBC he moved to Fort Nelson to teach in 1973 and 1974. In 1975 he moved to Nakusp, in the West Kootenay region, and immediately started recording bird life in the area. In 2011 and 2012 he published a two-part treatise

Birds of the Nakusp, New Denver, and Burton region of southeastern British Columbia, 1975 to 2010 (see *Wildlife Afield* 8:1-103, 9:115-203).



Carolee Colter and **Paul Prappas** met in Seattle, Washington and discovered they shared a passion for birding. They subsequently settled in Nelson, British Columbia. In addition to their many birding adventures throughout Canada and the United States, they collect data for eBird, support a variety of environmental organizations, and jointly lead tours for the Creston Valley bird festival. Carolee is an independent consultant for natural food cooperatives in the United States and Canada. Paul teaches music and theatre, and is recently retired from the University of Washington.

