

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: Western Wood Pewee, *Contopus sordidula*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
1; I'm assuming by the amount of wear that it's adult, but EIJ can comment on that.
3. Parish: Cameron

Specific Locality: Peveto Woods Sanctuary

4. Date(s) when observed: 2 October 2021

5. Time(s) of day when observed: midday.
6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Paul E. Conover
City: Lafayette
State: LA

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): I mentioned to Charlie Lyon and Rosemary Seidler that I had a good candidate for WWPE at Peveto and they joined me there to check it out. We all got good looks through scope, etc.

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Overcast, which was a problem for getting correct color tones, and perhaps proper lack of contrast, but I tried to document it from varied angles and with different backgrounds.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss 10s, Nikon Fieldscope 20-60x (plus Samsung S8 phone), Nikon 3500 w/200mm lens.

11. Distance to bird(s): About 20 meters for most of sighting, but a few flights of the bird had it land within 10 meters.

12. Duration of observation: Off and on over a couple of hours. When Charlie let me know he was interested in seeing it I did my best to keep it in sight and got a good feel for its habits and perches. I had watched the bird for a half hour or so before Charlie called, then I babysat the bird for about an hour, then we watched it for probably fifteen minutes, so we got great looks at it. I'm not sure if Charlie got good photos; he had to take a restroom break and discovered the Golden-crowned Warbler, so that understandably side-tracked the rest of the afternoon.

13. Habitat: Remnant cheniere with tall old growth Live Oaks, much open understory, and a wide array of perches including snags in oak trees.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

The bird consistently perched on open snags about 30-40 feet high, actively sallying out on long flights to treetop levels to catch flying insects in a manner reminiscent of Olive-sided Flycatcher. The bird would occasionally switch perches or even trees. At one point it flew above the treetops to persistently harass an Olive-sided Flycatcher. On a couple of occasions the bird landed on perches under a canopy of leaves.

15. Description:

A very brownish pewee with weak wingbars, extensive duskiness below, and a dark bill.

The following notes were voice recorded as I watched the bird at close scope range and were transcribed later:

“Upper wingbars are very worn or reduced; margins are almost non-existent. The lower wingbar is broad, formed by a pale tip—a dark bracket at the tip of the shaft with pale filling in the rest of the margin; tertials are very worn or drab; very dark centers versus mantle. Primaries have thin edging; tail is very worn or drab, same color as primaries, secondaries, and tertials; very little secondary edging; tail is dull brown, back is dull brown; whole head and face is equally evenly dull-colored brown; the dull darkness extends below malar area; throat and chin are very smudgy; eye dark, a very slight eyering pigmented brown; bill is dark, looks thin perhaps because it’s dark. If there’s any pale it’s at the base in the center; I’m looking at it through scope, getting great looks at it. The light is better through the eyepiece than through the phone (i.e digiscoping with phone)”

To elaborate on the preceding description:

The dorsal color was evenly brownish from rump to crown and face with no contrastingly darker areas such as crown. This color was not particularly dark; it contrasted with the darker but distinctly brown wing and tail feathers (and perhaps some lower uppertail coverts). The edgings to the plain brown feathers of the wing were a very weakly-brown-tinted whitish, somewhat of a sepia like the white of a faded photo, but not buffy or cinnamon as I’d expect from a juvenile.



The edgings to the pewee-scaled upper wing bar were very thin, making the upper wingbar very weak (seemingly thinner on right side). The edgings to the lower wingbar were broader and somewhat crescentic, but with a blurry border between feather edge and base color of rest of feather. The edgings of the tertials were similar in extent to that of the lower wingbar; the secondaries and primaries had extremely narrow margins.

The auriculars did not contrast strongly or sharply with the throat, but bled onto the sides of the throat leaving only the center of the throat slightly paler but still dingy. A broad band of darker grayish brown extended unbroken across the upper breast and extended down the sides of the breast beyond the lower wingbar. A small paler area on the keel below the broad breast band was the only pale relief of the dinginess of the throat and breast; for instance, there was no small paler spot at the base of the throat at the top of the breast band that darker specimens of Eastern at LSUMNS seem to show.



The dingy color of the throat resumed below the dark breast markings and extended to about the vent. Vent and undertail were a slightly lighter version of this color. There appeared to be some slightly darker diffuse smudgy feather centers on some undertail coverts on the tip of the tract.

Bill appeared all dark, but at high zoom levels I thought I could detect a little granular paler color at the corners of the base of the lower mandible. Legs dark. Eyes dark brown.

Eyering was brown.



16. Voice: Not noted, although when watching the bird live and on video, I see its mouth open several times, sometimes as if the bird was agitated. I hope those of you with keen ears will see if you can pick up sound from the video (although keep in mind that the bird is farther away than it appears through the zoom of the scope and phone).

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Eastern Wood Pewee. Bird had no olive or plain gray tones, but was rather brownish above and brownish-gray below. No contrast between mantle, nape, crown, and auriculars; all appeared identical in color and saturation. Bill of bird was essentially all dark; if there was indeed pale at base, it would have been hard to detect even in-hand. The upper wingbar on this bird was also extremely weak, which is a supporting detail, not a definitive mark. Overall, the entire suite of features on this bird indicated Western.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Photos embedded, video attached. Note that color and contrast is a weak version of what was visible in the field due to poor lighting (skylined bird against an overcast sky, so the camera strains to lighten everything) but should give an idea of the original.

19. Previous experience with this species:

Fairly extensive and studied intensively out west, and deep experience with Eastern. I have collected three pewees in the past few years that I felt were Westerns, all of which have been accepted as Westerns by the committee.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

21. This description is written from: Notes transcribed above, field observation, video and photo study.

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes. There are no accepted photo records for this species for the state, but I feel that this is a strong enough candidate to bring forward to review.

23. Date: 17 April 2022; more photos added and some edits in June and July 2022.

Video stills on top row, then photos taken with DSLR to show how phone video produced a brightened image:



As shot vs. brightened DSLR images. Brightening allows more detail to be seen but of courses washes image out.



Unbrightened but a close range image so less interference from background.



All images below brightened to highlight details.





W/ OSFL. I perceive the pewee color as browner.

Wing and tail for purposes of ageing.



