

# First Juvenal Ash-throated Flycatcher in Illinois

by John O'Brien



*Juvenal Ash-throated Flycatcher, McCormick Place, Cook Co., 31 Aug. 1995. Photo by John O'Brien.*

About 8 a.m. on 31 Aug. 1995, I discovered a juvenal Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) just south of the McCormick Place Convention Center along the Chicago lakefront. I watched and photographed the flycatcher for about 15 minutes. Several other birders relocated it later that day and on 1 Sept. 1995, the last day it was seen. The bird remained largely within the confines of two low clumps of bushes. On the second day I noted one or two Great Crested Flycatchers (*M. crinitus*) in the surrounding locust trees, occasionally providing good comparative views. The Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC) has accepted this record.

This is the third report of an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Illinois. The first was seen 2 to 9 Nov. 1973 and collected on 9 Nov., in Washington Park, Springfield (Bohlen 1975). A second bird, seen on 4 Sept. 1994 in Jackson Park, Chicago, by Paul Clyne is still under review by IORC.

Ash-throated Flycatchers have been recorded as fall vagrants about 100 times in the states and provinces east of the Mississippi River (Murphy 1982, Clyne 1996 - unpublished; plus my review of recent records in *American Birds*). These records span the period 4 Sept. to 26 Dec; an

additional eight have been seen in January and February. Nearly all winter records have been from Gulf Coast states where Ash-throated Flycatchers are regular winterers east to Louisiana (Stedman 1994). Only 10 records exist from inland localities in the east: three each in Illinois and Ontario (James et al. 1976, Weir 1983), and one each in Michigan (Tessen 1995), Minnesota (Tessen 1991), Quebec (David and Gosselin 1978), and West Virginia (Hall 1991). Strongly coastal distribution of vagrants has been pointed out earlier by Murphy (1982).

Due to the difficulty of aging basic plumaged individuals in the field and hand (Pyle et al. 1987), the age of most birds is unknown. The Springfield specimen was a female in basic plumage; its fully ossified skull suggests it was an adult. The Jackson Park bird appeared to be an adult in fresh basic plumage. My sighting involved a bird in juvenal plumage, with visible body molt in progress. I found only one previous record of an eastern vagrant in juvenal

plumage, a female collected on Block Island, RI, on 15 Sept. 1960 (Baird 1962). This bird was in very worn plumage and only beginning its post-juvenal molt, but it had a completely ossified skull. Simon (1958) collected a specimen and reported it as an "immature", but did not specify the

plumage or how the bird was aged.

My 31 Aug. date is the earliest eastern North America record, and seems unlikely for this traditionally late fall vagrant. However, this pattern may not reflect the whole story. Paul Clyne has prepared an exhaustive summary of extralimital fall Ash-throated Flycatchers in the U.S. and Canada in support of his 4 Sept 1994 record. Clyne noted two distinct patterns of occurrence. The majority of eastern records fall between mid-October and late December. The first Illinois record, 2-9 Nov., 1973 (Bohlen 1975), fits this pattern. Clyne notes, however, that the majority of extralimital records in the west, closer to its breeding range, are in August and September. The present record and Clyne's may be more closely related to this latter pattern.

The ensuing sections provide a description of the McCormick Place Ash-throated Flycatcher and notes on its identification and age. The description is taken from my notes and David Johnson's notes as well as