

AN EXTENSION OF THE REGULAR RANGE OF THE CRESTED FLYCATCHER

by

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This beautiful flycatcher is about as large as our Eastern Kingbird. However, it's tail is longer and the general outline of the bird is noticeably slimmer. It is olive-brown above, turning to rufous or cinnamon on the inner webs of the tail. The throat and upper breast are ashy-gray and underparts sulphur-yellow. The sexes are alike, although the females are somewhat duller in color.

The Crested Flycatcher is quite a noisy species, especially during the breeding season, and it's strident calls may be heard throughout the summer, coming from its favorite habitat of open woodland and the edges of heavy forest. There it usually keeps to the higher foliage, and though it may be glimpsed as it passes from branch to branch, tree to tree, feeding as it goes, in this last respect it differs from most other flycatchers; species that are most often seen perched on some isolated branch-tip, darting out at intervals, catching flies or winged insects.

It is a hole-nesting species, utilizing abandoned woodpecker holes; natural cavities in trees, and on occasion man-made nest-boxes. One peculiar habit of this bird is that it sometimes uses pieces of cast-off snake skin, and where these are not available, strips of cellophane and even onion skins with which to line its nest.

This bird is quite common in the wooded districts of southern Manitoba. Atkinson reported it breeding along the Assiniboine as far east as Fort Ellice, Man. (Can. Catalogue, 1909). It is recorded as fairly common at Lake St. Martin, near Fairford and Gypsumville, Man. (Birds of the Lake St. Martin Region, T.M. Shortt-Sam Waller). Noted as "a summer resident, nesting in hollow trees and stubs". (Preliminary Annotated List of Birds, Riding Mtn, Nat'l Park, P.A. Taverner & R. Sutton). Spencer Pearse and L.B. Potter, recorded a species, May 24, 1933, in the Cypress Hills, near Eastend. (Can. Field-Nat'l. April, 1943, P.70.) M.G. Street noted one at Candle Lake Portage, May 28, 1944. (Blue Jay Vol.2, P.31), C. Stuart Houston and David H. Wright, noted a male at Greenwater Lake, Greenwater Lake Provincial Park, July.21, 1946. There is one record for Alberta - Elk Island Park, July. 16, 1939. (Can. Field Nat'l May 1940).

Saskatchewan records of the Crested Flycatcher have been very few until recent years. The only area in the province, in former years, where this species was undoubtedly common, and occurred regularly, was in the region of Madge Lake. H.H. Mitchell and F. Bard observing it there, reported, "The surprising number of Crested flycatchers seen indicated it a common species, although scarce elsewhere". (Game Commr. report, 1927). However, the finding of a nest of this species (the second nest ever reported for Saskatchewan) at High Hill, by Anton Waycheshen, in June 1944 and the regular recording of it for several years at Wallwort, Sask., by J.D. Ritchie extends the known regular range of this bird some 125 miles north westward of its previous known range in east-central Saskatchewan.

Mr. Waycheshen, writing of the nest he found, states: The nest was found in an abandoned "flicker-hole", about eight feet up in a dead poplar stump which was located among a thick stand of second-growth poplar, about 20 feet in height. Five eggs were laid; four of which were hatched. The young at first, were covered with a fine, grayish-black down". Mr. Waycheshen also writes: "The only spring migration record for this species was obtained May 17, 1946". (Editor's note: The unhatched egg referred to above, was forwarded to the Yorkton Natural History Society). Of the occurrence of the Crested Flycatcher at Wallwort, Mr. Ritchie, in a letter to M.G. Street, March 16, 1945, writes, "There are usually one or two pairs of crested flycatchers around my farm here every summer". Mr. Ritchie, also gives the following spring migration dates; May 18, 1933; May 20, 1935; May 18, 1937; May 22, 1944 and June 8, 1945.

The only other Saskatchewan records of this species are: George Lang reported it rare in south eastern Saskatchewan, nesting at Indian Head in 1892. The one nest found, contained a snake skin. (Mitchell, 1924). Mitchell collected a specimen at Rocky Lake, Moose Mtn., June 21, 1924. (Blue Jay Vol. 1, P.25).