

## Maryland Ornithological Society



### MOS Records Committee

### Study Skin Workshop

24 February 1990

#### HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax hammondi*)

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER. Immature female, collected 9 OCT 1963, Ocean City, MD. NMNH 479869. Originally identified as Least Flycatcher, reidentified as Hammond's by Daniel Gibson and Allan Phillips. (*Wilson Bulletin*, vol. 99 no. 3, SEPT 1987, p. 500).

Comparing this specimen with about 50 samples each of Hammond's and Least it was clearly very similar to the former, and unlike the latter, in plumage. The Hammond's has a darker gray, not whitish, throat, almost as dark as the breast band. The breast band is darker gray and contrasts more with a deeper yellow belly. The breast band and belly of the Least are both relatively paler and show much less contrast. As Bob Augustine put it, the Hammond's has a "Connecticut Warbler-like" pattern to the underparts. While this difference is easily seen in a large series, it might be hard to use in the field. Hal Wierenga was able to hide a Least specimen in the tray of Hammond's. It took us several minutes to find it!

We cleared up two measurement points that were not presented clearly enough in the original article. The wing formula given in Pyle, *et al.* of  $p_{10} > p_5$  for Hammond's and  $p_{10} > \text{or} < p_5$  for Least was confusing. Several Least's had  $p_{10} = p_5$  or just barely  $> p_5$ . The Ocean City Hammond's had  $p_{10}$  significantly  $> p_5$ . The wing formula clearly pointed to this bird being a Hammond's. Harvey Mudd was concerned with the paper's quoted tail measurement of 59 mm. This would give a wing (-) tail of only 4 mm, which fits Least but not Hammond's. Banks and Clapp both measured the tail as 49 mm, which gives a difference of 13 mm, fitting Hammond's much better than Least. This is apparently a typo.

The bill shape of this Hammond's was more slender and straight-sided when viewed from above, not so spade-shaped as Least. However, looking at the large sample in the museum, this is only an average difference, and several individuals of each seemed to have a bill very close, or closer, to that of the other species. Perhaps the least useful feature we looked at.

We also looked at Dusky and Western Flycatchers. Dusky, which is excluded by the wing formula, showed much less contrasting underparts than Hammond's, closer to Least. Western has a distinctive yellow tinge on the throat, and a hint of brownish orange wash across the breast.

We concluded that this specimen was a Hammond's Flycatcher, and that we personally would not be reporting any silent Hammond's any time soon.

Notes prepared by Dave Czaplak