

Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens* **- A New Bird for Kent**

Martin Casemore

September 22nd 2015, a day I'll never forget, started with me sea watching from the shelter of the fishing boats at The Point at Dungeness.

After about an hour sea-watching, dodging the frequent heavy showers by sheltering under one of the boats, a Red-throated Diver, Balearic Shearwater and few Skuas passing were all that I had had to keep me interested

When yet another heavy shower came through, I reluctantly took shelter again under and between the twin-hull of the same boat, which formed a wind tunnel making it nearly as uncomfortable as outside in the rain. The continuous drizzle over the sea reduced the visibility to virtually zero, but as I sat staring out into the gloom, a greenish grey passerine flew very low up the beach passing within a few feet of me and then disappeared around the side of the boat.

I had glimpsed some wing bars as it went past and my first thought was that it was just another Meadow Pipit coming in off the sea, but it didn't feel right. I left the shelter of the boat to see if I could find it again and as I came to the back of the boat I saw a passerine fly to the base of one of the fishing net boxes and settle on the shingle. I raised my binoculars and stared in total disbelief for a couple of seconds, uttering an expletive; then my brain clicked-in telling me to get a record image. I went to lift my camera, but I had left it in the dry under the boat, I dashed back the few yards, grabbed it, and returned only to find the bird wasn't there.

Fortunately it flitted out from behind a box, grabbing an insect and perching just a few yards away. The camera was up and on the bird, the shutter whirring away until the processor couldn't keep up, the settings were all wrong. I didn't care I had the record images.

I then got on the mobile and called David Walker, the Dungeness Bird Observatory warden, praying that I would get a signal and he would answer. He answered, and I told him to "...come to the fishing boats, NOW!!! There's an American Flycatcher here!!!". He arrived within minutes, although it seemed to me waiting for him, to take forever as I tried to keep track of the bird and at the same time call the locals, half of which seemed to frustratingly go to answerphone.

Fortunately the bird showed well on-and-off for a couple of hours on the beach, though it was very mobile. It did go missing for a while, but was re-found by Jake Everitt at Southview Cottage, the home of David & Sheila Bunney, where it showed on-and-off in-and -around their garden until dusk, allowing about a thousand birders to see it.

Tony Greenland brought a North American field guide to site, which enabled the few of us there to narrow the Flycatchers identification to either Acadian or Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. When the Flycatcher had gone missing David Walker, Gillian Hollamby and myself had gone back to the observatory, and with the aid of the literature there, and the images we had taken, we came to the conclusion that it was an Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens*, due to the structure, the long primaries and the longish broad bill.

With the weather improving during the evening and overnight it had unfortunately departed by the following morning.

Following DNA analysis of a sample of the birds' excrement, it was indeed confirmed as an Acadian Flycatcher.

The record was submitted to BBRC and accepted by them, and remains with the BOURC for categorizing. This is the first Kent record.

