

Olive-sided Flycatcher (OSFL)

Contopus cooperi

Description

Olive-sided Flycatchers are relatively large (~20 cm long) flycatchers with an upright posture, big head, peaked crown, short, notched tail, and stout bill. They are distinguished from other flycatchers by their plumage: deep brownish-olive colour on their upperparts (darkest on top of the head), dark wings with faint gray wing-bars, bright white throat and center of belly, and olive-gray sides that are often streaked. The contrast of the white belly with olive sides makes this species look like it is wearing an open vest, which distinguishes it from other flycatchers in Newfoundland. Sexes are indistinguishable, and their plumage does not vary throughout the year. Juveniles are also similar in appearance to adults, though they are generally browner.

Known and potential breeding habitat

Olive-sided Flycatchers breed in edge habitats, typically between coniferous forests and open habitats, such as wetlands or disturbed forest (harvested, insect outbreak, burnt, etc.). In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed between 29 May and 25 August and has been confirmed in western (Stephenville and east of Barachois Pond Provincial Park) and central (northwest of Gander) Newfoundland.

Detection Tips

Habitat

Most often, Olive-sided Flycatchers are observed at the very top of dead trees (snags) or live coniferous trees, which they use as a location to forage or sing from. They are also observed in edges between coniferous forests and open habitats where insect abundance is often highest, such as wetlands, lakes, meadows, harvested land, or fire-disturbed areas.

Vocalization

The song of an Olive-sided Flycatcher is a distinct, loud 3-note whistle where the first note has a lower pitch than the other two. Mnemonically, their song sounds like “*quick, THREE BEERS!*”. From a distance, only two notes may be heard: “*FREE BEER*”. When making vocalizations to one another, they make an evenly spaced “*pip, pip, pip*”.



Photo By: Denise McIsaac



Edge



COSEWIC Ranking:
Special Concern



NL Designation:
Threatened



Flycatchers

Photo By: Darrian Washinger





Photo By: Scott Leslie

Behaviour

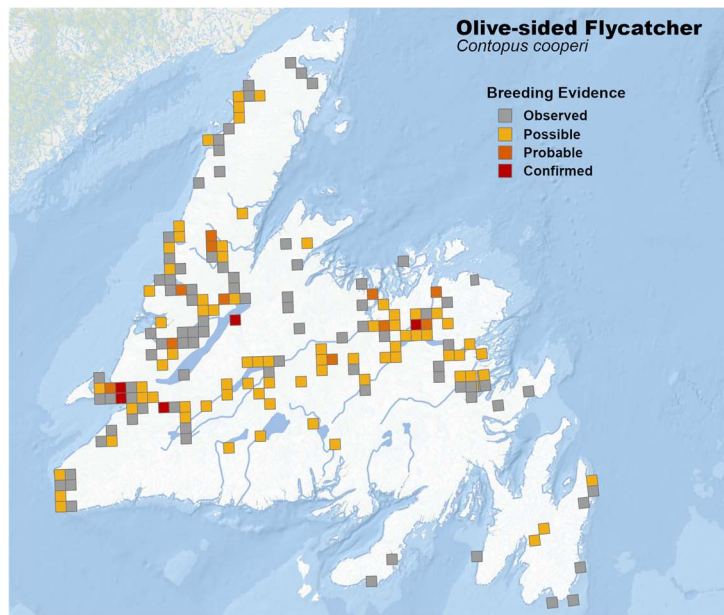
Olive-sided Flycatchers are conspicuous as they sit bolt upright on exposed perches at the top of tall trees, calling continuously during the breeding season. They tend to be solitary and territorial on the breeding grounds. Both sexes aggressively defend their territory and often divebomb and chase predators away, including humans. Females may drop to the ground when scared off the nest; otherwise they are rarely observed on the ground. When flying, they typically fly directly and quickly, but flights may become more erratic when pursuing insect prey. They return to their perch to eat the insects they catch on the wing.

Nesting

Nests are predominantly built by females on horizontal branches in coniferous trees; nests are often situated away from the tree trunk. The female brings materials (e.g., twigs, roots, grasses) to the nest site in her bill and positions them to make a bulky, but shallow, cup nest. Females lay one brood per season, with 3 creamy white to pale salmon eggs. Eggs often have a wreath of purplish-gray spots around the large end. While only females incubate and brood nestlings, both adults feed young.

Breeding Evidence

Most often, breeding evidence for Olive-sided Flycatchers will be singing males (S) or individuals observed (H) in a suitable nesting habitat. Other likely breeding evidence includes a pair in a suitable nesting habitat in nesting season (P), permanent territory presumed through a territorial song or occurrence at the same breeding habitat location on two days, a week or more apart (T), courtship display (D), agitated behaviour or anxiety calls of an adult (A), nest building (NB), fledged young (FY), adults entering or leaving a nest site (AE), adults carrying food for young (CF), and a nest containing eggs (NE) or young (NY).



Olive-sided Flycatchers (*Contopus cooperi*) have been detected in 178 squares in Newfoundland over the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 5 of these squares.