

Nova Scotia Species At Risk Beneficial Management Practices Series

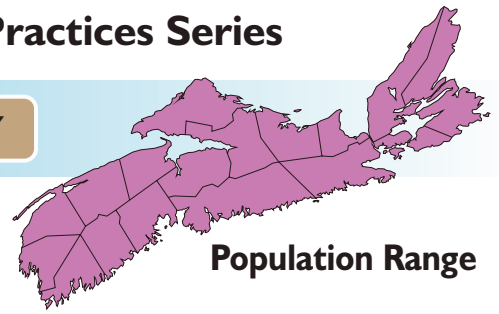
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Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*

STATUS

Special Concern 
Vulnerable 

FORESTRY



Found throughout Nova Scotia. Winters primarily in South America. Declined by 70% over the last 40 years in Canada.



An adult Eastern Wood-pewee, showing two light wing bars, and an orange lower bill



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An Eastern Wood-Pewee sitting on its nest



© CLARA FERRARI

Breeding habitat has an open understory, and complex vertical structure, with many snags and dead limbs that provide foraging perches and open spaces around them

SPECIES DESCRIPTION

- A small forest bird (15 cm long), with long wings and tail, and a straight, thin bill.
- Plumage is greyish-olive above and pale below, with a greenish wash on their breast and sides, which can give them the appearance of wearing a dusky vest. Their wings have two white wing bars.
- Their peaked crown gives their head a triangular shape.
- Males and females are similar in appearance.
- Identification of flycatchers can be challenging. Compared to the more common Least Flycatcher, the Eastern Wood-Pewee is larger in size, and has a darker face, weaker eye-ring, and longer, more pointed wings.
- They are aerial insectivores, often seen perching in an upright position, as they search for flying insect prey. Preferred prey includes wasps, bees, flies, and moths.
- Male Eastern Wood-Pewees sing a distinctive, slurred “pee-a-wee”, “wee-ur”, or wee-ooo” song from exposed perches to advertise their breeding territories. The call lasts about 1 second and the last note trails off.

KEY TERMS

Aerial insectivore

A guild of birds that feed by capturing flying insects. This guild includes Whip-poor-wills, nighthawks, swifts, swallows, martins and flycatchers.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION

- Eastern Wood-Pewee breed in mature and intermediate-aged deciduous or mixed forest, and occasionally in coniferous forest. In Nova Scotia, they are often found in stands dominated by Maple, Birch, Oak, Pine, or Hemlock.
- Breeding habitat has an open understory, and complex vertical structure, with many snags and dead limbs that provide foraging perches and open space around them.
- They often nest near canopy gaps, forest edges and clearings, and near lakes, rivers, or wetlands, which provide flying insect prey.
- Nests are built on the limbs of tall, mature trees far from the trunk. They require long, horizontal branches for successful nesting.
- They hunt for prey in openings in or below the canopy and perch on dead branches 10-12 meters high while hunting.



An adult (left) Eastern Wood-pewee with three fledglings

© JEFF BRYANT

THREATS

- Habitat loss and degradation. On their breeding grounds, this includes the loss of mature forest cover.
- Large-scale declines in the availability of flying insect prey due to factors including acid rain, climate change, and pesticides. At a local scale, prey availability can be impacted by widespread spraying of pesticides that impact non-target insect species.
- Mortality on their wintering grounds and during migration, due to severe storms.
- Nest predation by species such as Blue Jays, Crows, Ravens, Red Squirrels and others.
- White-tailed deer over browsing, resulting in habitat alteration.

HOW YOU CAN HELP (BENEFICIAL PRACTICES)

- Learn to identify Eastern Wood-Pewee and report all observations (see “Report Sightings”).
- Learn to recognize preferred habitat for Eastern Wood-Pewee on your property.
- Avoid harvesting and silvicultural activities during the nesting season (May 15- August 15).
- Harvest on frozen ground to minimize damage to soils, such as rutting and compaction.
- If you find a nest in a tree, mark the trees around it (do not draw attention to the nest tree by marking it) and refrain from activities within 20 m until the end of the nesting season.
- Use selection harvest techniques such as single tree selection, moderate crop release or small group selection, in order to create large tracts of old or mid-aged forest with higher basal areas and small canopy gaps.
- Maintain large, mature trees (>30 cm DBH in deciduous forests and >35 cm DBH in coniferous/mixedwood forests).
- Maintain a total basal area of 22 m²/ha.
- Maintain gap dynamics of small scale, continuous, incremental disturbances that support the development of uneven-aged stand structure.
- In areas of abundant advanced regeneration create more variability in canopy gap size, including some group openings from 0.02 to 0.21 ha in size.

Project Partners:



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An example of suitable breeding habitat for Eastern Wood-Pewee

- Whenever possible, retain snags and live deciduous cavity trees, which provide hunting perches.
- Avoid or limit the use of pesticides that may negatively affect non-pest insect populations. Herbicide application also lowers the abundance of insects eaten by aerial insectivores.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Eastern Wood-Pewee or other species at risk view the **Species at Risk in Nova Scotia, Identification and Information Guide** available online at <http://www.sarguide.speciesatrisk.ca>

Landbird species at risk in forested wetlands website: <http://landbirdsar.merseytobetic.ca/>

REPORT SIGHTINGS

When possible, report any of your observations of species at risk. Details such as time, date, location (Geographic or UTM coordinates) as well as photos are valuable additions to all reports.

Contact: 1-866-727-3447, sightings@speciesatrisk.ca AND the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, biodiversity@novascotia.ca.

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