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RECORD OF LESSER ANTILLEAN PEWEE (*CONTOPUS LATIROSTRIS*) IN  
NEVIS, WEST INDIES

MARK MICHAEL LUDLOW<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Candidate, Ornitho-Archaeology, University of Wales – Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, United Kingdom; e-mail MMLBird@aol.com; <sup>2</sup>Current address: 501 Slaters Lane #1022, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, USA; & Blue Roofed House (Blue Monkey), Oualie Lane South, Oualie Bay, St. James Windward Parish, Nevis, West Indies.

*Abstract.* --- Mark Michael Ludlow observed, at a close distance, a single Lesser Antillean Pewee in St. James Parish, Nevis, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis, West Indies, on 14 September 2014.

*Key words.* --- *Lesser Antillean Pewee*, *Contopus latirostris Caribbean*, *Nevis*.

LESSER ANTILLEAN PEWEE (*CONTOPUS LATIROSTRIS*)

Lesser Antillean Pewee, in three subspecies, is considered ‘resident on Puerto Rico (primarily western and central portions) and in the northern Lesser Antilles (St. Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, and Guadeloupe)’ (AOU 1998: 393). Bond (1985), Sibley and Monroe (1990: 353), Clements (2000: 339), Dickinson (2003: 368), and Cole (2013), join AOU (1998: 393) and express similar opinions regarding the species current distribution and do not indicate that the Lesser Antillean Pewee occurs on the island of Nevis, West Indies.

A checklist of bird species previously reported on Nevis found on the website ([www.birdsofstkittsnevis.com](http://www.birdsofstkittsnevis.com)), maintained by Michael Ryan of the nearby island of St. Christopher (St. Kitts), states this species has been seen 3 times previously on the island of Nevis and recorded first on St. Christopher in 1982 and last in 1988. Reported sightings on St. Christopher have been from Philip’s Level, an area in the mountains above the village of Molineux (Christ Church Nicola Town Parish) on the northeastern side of the island of St. Kitts as well as from the arid southeastern peninsula of St. Christopher (St. George Basseterre Parish). Raffaele *et al* (1998: Locality Checklist, 477) chose to artificially conjoin the two geographically and ecologically separate and distinct islands of Nevis and St. Christopher and so place a question mark (?) in that Locality Checklist as to whether Lesser Antillean Pewee occurs, and if it occurs, the question becomes, on which one of these two separate islands are they referring or are they referring to both?

Raffaele *et al* (1998: 354-355) and Raffaele *et al* (2003: 124) confuse matters regarding both the taxonomy and thereby the distribution of Lesser Antillean Pewee. They chose to split Lesser Antillean Pewee into three distinct species as opposed to Lesser Antillean Pewee and its two races. They recognize two new species from the two races: Puerto Rico Pewee (*Contopus portoricensis*) for Lesser Antillean Pewee in that range; St. Lucia Pewee (*Contopus oberi*) for Lesser Antillean Pewee in that range; and Lesser Antillean Pewee (*Contopus latirostris*) in all its remaining ranges (Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, with sporadic reports from St. Christopher).

Ignoring the presumptions of Raffaele *et al* (1998 & 2003), this species may be in fractured remnant populations from ancient taxon radiations and taxon contractions: A possible complex example of an avian ‘Taxon Cycle’ in the Caribbean (Ricklefs and Bermingham 2002; Ricklefs and Cox 1972 & 1978; Ricklefs and Miller 2000). The sightings on Nevis and St. Kitts may also represent a re-radiation effort by this species. This hypothesis is currently a matter of speculation and awaits future data. A fuller significance of this sighting remains undetermined. Combined with past and future records, fuller patterns may become clearer. As in this case, and in the future,

increasing numbers of bird watchers and ornithological researchers in the field, on comparatively remote and under frequented islands, for sustained periods of time, may account for increasing numbers of documented reports.

#### NEVIS

Nevis is a compact oceanic island of volcanic origin with an area of circa 93 km<sup>2</sup> (circa 36 square miles), situated in the northern Lesser Antilles. Politically it is a portion of the two island country, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis. The island rises gradually from the shore to a central peak of circa 985 meters (circa 3232 feet) and exhibits a range of natural and secondary habitats which include: elfin woodland, montane forest, palm brake, grassland, coastal scrub, dry woodland, and farmland (Robinson and Lowery 2000). The island is generally in a state of arrested natural biological succession, caused by human introduced non-native alien mammalian animal species. Island wide denudation of the once natural vegetation began in the early Colonial Period for the production of tobacco, indigo, cotton, and sugarcane and culminated in mono-crop sugarcane grown under the agra-industrial plantation system which was dependent upon the labor of enslaved persons, first from Ireland and ultimately from Africa in great numbers.

#### THE RECORDED SIGHTING

On 14 September 2014 at late morning, Mark Michael Ludlow (the observer) saw a single Lesser Antillean Pewee along the well-known trail to Lover's Beach, St. James Windward Parish, Nevis, West Indies (17°12'11.69"N/62°36'24.38"W at circa sea level). That well known trail runs from the Main Island Road down to the beach on the northwest end of the island of Nevis. The bird was found circa 15 yards into the trail along side of Hurricane Hill going to Lover's Beach from the informal parking area and was circa 0.13 miles from the beach. The observer's first impression, as it flew in front of him from right to left across the trail, was that this was an unusually dark flycatcher like bird. The bird landed on a branch circa 3 feet off the ground which was at eye level because the observer was standing in the deeply gullied trail. The bird was observed well and unobstructed from circa 15 feet for circa 10 seconds. The bird was not photographed. The next day efforts were made to relocate the bird and photograph it - without success.

This observation is part of the efforts of the Nevis Ornithological Society to document all of the species of birds to be found solely on the island of Nevis (and proximal Booby Island). Historically bird species listings have artificially conjoined the two geologically and ecologically separate and distinct islands (the island of St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and the island of Nevis): An example would be the 'Locality Checklist' within Raffaele *et al* (1998: 453-495). The Nevis Ornithological Society is also attempting to: 1) systematically review and evaluate reported bird sightings on the island of Nevis, as well as Booby Island, with a high degree of academic rigor; and 2) provide a central repository for those accepted reports that are solely for the island of Nevis and Booby Island.

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