



Olive-sided Flycatcher

Photo: © John D. Reynolds



Scientific name
Contopus cooperi

Taxon
Birds

COSEWIC status
Special Concern

Canadian range
Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador

Reason for designation
The Canadian population of this widespread forest songbird has experienced a substantial long-term decline, although the rate of decrease has slowed over the past decade. Loss of wintering habitat in northern South America is likely the greatest threat facing this aerial insectivore, but the species may also be affected by changes on the breeding grounds such as the effects of altered fire regimes and changing climates on nesting habitat quality, and reductions in the abundance and availability of aerial insect prey. Concerns for the species remain, as most of these threats are continuing, and those related to climate change may increase.

Wildlife species description and significance
Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) is a medium-sized songbird, 18-20 cm in length. Adults are a deep brownish-olive above, with whitish

extending from the throat, centre of breast and belly to the undertail coverts, contrasting sharply with the dark flanks and sides of the breast to appear vested. White tufts are also often visible above the wings on each side of the rump. The wings are dark with indistinct pale wing bars, and the bill is stout. Olive-sided Flycatchers tend to perch conspicuously atop tall trees or snags while foraging, giving their distinctive song—a loud three-note whistle: *Quick, THREE BEERS!*

Distribution
Olive-sided Flycatcher is a widespread migratory species, with 53% of its breeding range across most of forested Canada, and the remainder in the western and northeastern United States. The winter distribution is concentrated in northern South America, particularly in the Northern Andes Mountains in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, but also in western Brazil, Venezuela, and Bolivia. It is occasionally found wintering in other highland areas from Mexico through Central America, including parts of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and Costa Rica.



Global range of Olive-sided Flycatcher
Source: Allman and Sallabanks 2012; Partners In Flight Science Committee 2013a; Haché et al. 2014

Habitat
Olive-sided Flycatcher is most often associated with edges of coniferous or mixed forests with tall trees or snags for perching, alongside open areas, or in burned forest with standing trees and snags. In natural conditions, these habitats may include open to semi-open mature forest stands, as well as mature stands with edges near wet areas (such as rivers, muskeg, bogs or swamps), burned forest, openings created by insect outbreaks, barrens, or other gaps. The species

also uses forest stands adjacent to human-created openings (such as clearcuts, thinned stands, and prescribed burns). There is some limited evidence that birds nesting in and near harvested habitats experience lower breeding success than those nesting adjacent to natural (e.g., burned) openings. In the Rocky Mountains and westward, Olive-sided Flycatcher occurs in sparsely vegetated forests from sea level to 2250 m in proximity to wetland edge, whereas farther east, it is most frequently found near wetland areas or in recent burns.

Biology

Olive-sided Flycatcher is an aerial insectivore, generally making short foraging flights from a high perch to intercept flying insects. The egg and nestling stages in Canada can last from late May/mid-June to early/mid-August, depending on latitude. Olive-sided Flycatchers arrive on their Canadian breeding grounds between April and June, but predominantly around mid-May. They are socially monogamous, with large territories of 10-20 ha. Nests are typically built in coniferous trees. Average clutch size is three eggs, and a single brood is raised. Nest success ranges from 30 to 65%, differing by region and habitat type. Renesting is common if the first clutch fails. Olive-sided Flycatchers have been known to live for at least 7 years. Fall migration begins in late July, with most birds departing for the wintering grounds between mid-August and early September.

Population Sizes and Trends

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate declines for Olive-sided Flycatcher in Canada, which are not significant in the short term (2.1% mean annual decline for the period 2006-2016, equating to a cumulative decline of 19%), but are significant in the long term (2.8% mean annual decline for the period 1989-2016, and a cumulative decline of 72% since 1970). Both short and long-term declines have been greatest in New Brunswick, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Yukon. Data from another large dataset (Boreal Avian Modelling Project) do not provide evidence of decline between 1997 and 2013.

Some migration monitoring stations report declining trends, though data are scarce. In the U.S. portion of the breeding range, there is evidence of northward range retractions in California, New Hampshire, and New York. Overall, evidence suggests that declines have continued over the past decade, though on average at a somewhat lower rate than previously.

Threats and Limiting Factors

Forest loss on the wintering grounds in Central and South America may be the most significant factor driving population declines. Insectivorous birds as a group have been experiencing declines, likely associated with widespread insect declines, pesticide use (particularly neonicotinoids), and changes in prey availability during the breeding season as a possible result of climate change. Habitat loss or degradation is likely affecting this species on both the breeding and wintering grounds. On the breeding grounds, this occurs through forest harvesting, anthropogenic disturbance such as development and service corridors, and changes in fire regimes associated with climate change and direct human intervention (fire suppression), all of which may reduce habitat quality and affect nest success.

Protection, Status, and Ranks

Olive-sided Flycatcher is classified as G4 (Apparently Secure) globally and in the United States, and N3 (Vulnerable) in Canada by NatureServe. Provincial and territorial breeding season rankings (except Nunavut, where it was not assessed) range from S1S3 to S4 (Critically Imperilled to Apparently Secure). All regional rankings have changed to be less secure since the last COSEWIC assessment in 2007. The IUCN Red List classified this species as Near Threatened in 2012 and again in 2016. Olive-sided Flycatcher is protected in Canada by the *Species at Risk Act* (2002), where it is listed as Threatened under Schedule 1. It is also listed on provincial species at risk legislation in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. It is protected in Canada under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* (1994) and by similar legislation in the United States and Mexico.

Source: COSEWIC. 2018. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. ix + 52 pp.

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