

Philadelphia Vireo: new to the Western Palearctic



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On 12th October 1985, while birding on Galley Head, Co. Cork, with J. Adamson and P. A. Cummins, I discovered an unfamiliar bird feeding with some Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus* and Goldcrests *Regulus regulus*. The initial view of its bluish 'cap' and greenish upperparts made me suspect Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*. When the bird turned around, however, and revealed its lemon-yellow underparts, I realised that it was a species unfamiliar to me. We watched it for as long as was possible before we had to leave to catch the ferry to Cape Clear Island. Aboard the ferry, we met several other birdwatchers and we were able to refer to the *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (1983). From this guide, we were able to make a tentative identification of Philadelphia Vireo *V. philadelphicus*, although this book warned that Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*, a species which I had not seen, could be similar. That night, however, when I saw the photograph of Philadelphia Vireo in the *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds* (1977), I became certain of the identification. We revisited Galley Head the following day, along with several other birdwatchers, and the identification was confirmed.

The Philadelphia Vireo remained in the area until 17th October, and it was seen by a large number of observers. It was also photographed (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 10-11; 88: plates 141-143). It is likely that it had been in the area since at least 7th October, when there was a report of a possible Red-eyed Vireo from the same location.

The following description of the bird is compiled from the descriptions submitted to the Irish Rare Birds Committee:

SIZE AND STRUCTURE Slightly larger than Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, perhaps about the size of a Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*, but with a completely different structure. It was rather stockier, with a deep-bellied appearance, and noticeably short-tailed. The tail was notched.

PLUMAGE Forehead and crown soft bluish-grey. Prominent white supercilium running from base of the bill onto the ear-coverts, broadest above and behind the eye. Dark eye-stripe from base of the bill, through the eye and onto the ear-coverts. Below the eye, an obvious white line almost acted as a mirror image of the supercilium. This was broadest directly below the eye and created a distinctive 'pale-faced' appearance. Lower 'cheeks' warm yellow. Mantle and rump uniform, light olive-green. Wings also predominantly olive-green, but outer greater coverts had pale fringes and slightly paler tips, forming an indistinct wing-bar. Inner webs of greater coverts and tertials darker, sepia; primaries and primary coverts

also this colour. Uppertail uniform light sepia, with paler outer tail feathers. Undertail dark. Throat and upper breast warm yellow, with rest of the underparts entirely washed yellow, although not so bright as the throat; a slight olive suffusion on the sides of the breast.

BARE PARTS Bill short but rather fat and quite broad-based; predominantly dark, although greyish towards the base, and the extreme tip was also pale. Legs dark grey. Eye dark and rather prominent owing to the pale-faced appearance.

HABITAT AND BEHAVIOUR The bird frequented tall Sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus*, although it did on occasions move down into the undergrowth, which consisted mainly of Escallonia *Escallonia macrantha* and Fuchsia *Fuchsia magellanica*. Its behaviour was rather like that of a *Hippolais* warbler, alternating between bursts of activity and spells of lethargy. It regularly remained motionless for several minutes at a time, often making it difficult to locate.



Plate 141. Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*, Co. Cork, October 1985 (R. T. Mills)

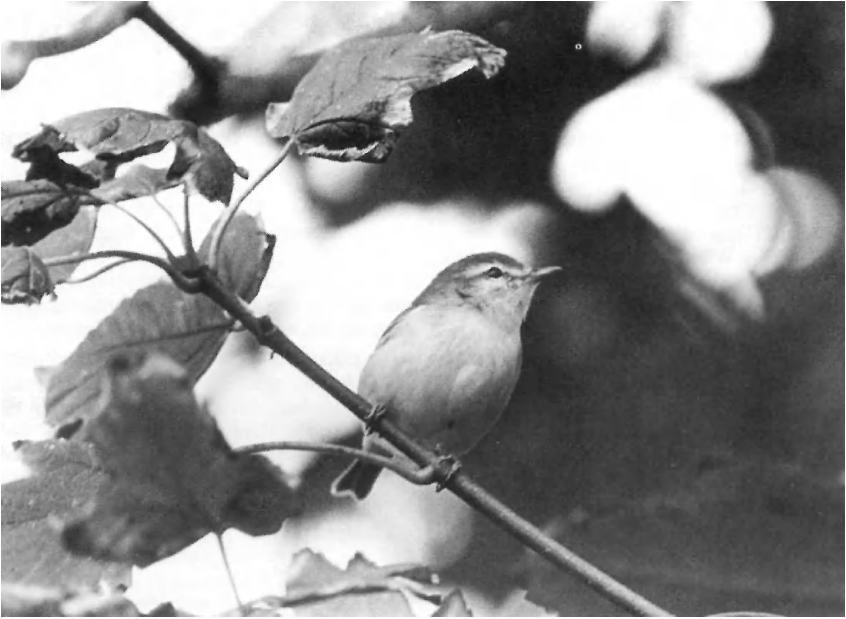


Plate 142. Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*, Co. Cork, October 1985 (R. T. Mills)

The record was accepted by the Irish Rare Birds Committee as the first for Ireland (Brazier *et al.* 1986). It is also the first record for the Western Palearctic. The file was sent to Will Russell, who fully endorsed the record. He commented as follows: 'Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus* can be washed with yellow on the flanks and lower belly, but lacks the bright yellow on the throat and chest, and more importantly lacks the dark line between the bill and eye, giving the bird a blank-faced appearance. Red-eyed Vireo of the yellow tropical race *flavoviridis* could be that yellow below but is larger and has a big, noticeably hooked bill as well as a far more contrasting face and greyer back. Other vireos have wing-bars.'

The Philadelphia Vireo has a breeding range that extends from southern British Columbia and southern Alberta in the west to Newfoundland and northern New England in the east. It winters in Central and South America (Bull & Farrand 1977).

Robbins (1980), predicting potential future Nearctic vagrants to Europe, rated Philadelphia Vireo as the thirty-second most likely candidate out of his top 38. It had a rather low predicted number of 0.91, against 4.86 for the 'most likely' species, Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*. October 1985 was, however, exceptional for American landbirds in Britain & Ireland, with at least 45 individuals of 18 species, including Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla* and Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*. The exceptional number of Nearctic landbirds was preceded by Ireland's first Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, on 30th September. There were also records of Nearctic passerines in the Netherlands and France.

The Galley Head Philadelphia Vireo was followed less than two years later by the first British record of the species: one on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, during 10th-13th October 1987 (Brodie Good 1991). To date, these are the only two records for the Western Palearctic.

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Plate 143. Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*, Co. Cork, October 1985 (R. T. Mills)

Video School. Enterprise New. Upload. Join or log in. Birds of Western Palearctic / Videos. Sort: Preset. Birds of Western Palearctic. Channels are a simple, beautiful way to showcase and watch videos. Browse more Channels. Vimeo. The vireos /vɪˈrɪoʊ/ make up a family, Vireonidae, of small to medium-sized passerine birds found in the New World (Canada to Argentina, including Bermuda and the West Indies) and Southeast Asia. "Vireo" is a Latin word referring to a green migratory bird, perhaps the female golden oriole, possibly the European greenfinch. They are typically dull-plumaged and greenish in color, the smaller species resembling wood warblers apart from their heavier bills. They range in size from the Chocó vireo, dwarf