FIRST RECORD OF THE EASTERN PHOEBE BREEDING IN ALASKA: EXTRALIMITAL BY 2000 KM

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The Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) nests across much of North America east of the Rocky Mountains (Sinclair et al. 2003, Van Damme 2010, Weeks 2011). Although Alberta represents the western extreme of the species' regular breeding distribution, extralimital nesting occasionally occurs west to southeastern Yukon Territory and northeastern British Columbia (Sinclair et al. 2003, Van Damme 2010). In Alaska, the Eastern Phoebe is a casual visitor with no previous nesting records (see Gibson and Withrow 2015; Table 1). Here we document the first record of the Eastern Phoebe nesting in the state of Alaska, the westernmost breeding record for the species and extralimital by 2000 km.

On 5 June 2016, a University of Alaska Fairbanks Summer Session birding party led by Wright found a single Eastern Phoebe frequently flying in and out of an abandoned aluminum camper trailer west of the Hastings Creek crossing of the Nome–Council Road on the Seward Peninsula, western Alaska. Wright investigated the inside of the trailer but found no signs of nesting. On 7 June, a Wilderness Birding Adventures group led by Bowman and Hauser independently reported an Eastern Phoebe in the driftwood along Hastings Creek. At the time, Bowman noted the bird repeatedly carrying nest material into a drainage culvert running north–south under the Nome–Council road, but after investigation found no nest structure. Birders continued to report a single Eastern Phoebe until 9 June when two birds were building a nest, again in the drainage culvert (B. Benter pers. comm.). The nest was ~3 m inside the culvert (64° 27′ 21″ N, 165° 5′ 45″ W), only 0.5 km from the coast of the Bering Sea. The nest structure was built on top of piping suspended ~0.25 m from the top of the culvert, was constructed primarily of mud, grass, moss, and lichen, and was lined with grass and qiviut (wool of the muskox, *Ovibos moschatus*; Figure 1).

It is unclear when eggs were laid or incubation began, but on 15 June Paul E. Lehman found a broken egg beneath the nest (remains to San Diego Natural History Museum). On 21 July Robinson observed and photographed nestlings (Figure 1). In late July, Robinson and DeCicco checked the nest frequently to determine its fate. Fledglings were first observed and photographed on 23 July (K. Persons in litt.), then on the 25th Robinson and DeCicco observed at least three fledged young (Figure 2) being fed by at least one adult in willows along the eastern edge of Hastings Creek. Despite searches of the area, the birds were not observed after 25 July. This, the first case of the Eastern Phoebe nesting in Alaska, is especially notable given this pair's ability to successfully fledge young 2000 km from the species' normal breeding range. It is unlikely that a pair of Eastern Phoebe could have nested in the coastal tundra zone of Alaska without the presence of human-made structures, such as the culvert.

The Eastern Phoebe is considered hardy in general and flexible in its diet (Weeks 2011). It often returns to its breeding range as early as March (Bent 1942, Weeks 2011), and it has been documented consuming fish (Jung 1926, Binford 1957) and fruits (Bent 1942, Graber et al. 1974) when insects are scarce, unlike most other North American flycatchers, which are exclusively insectivorous during the breeding season (Murphy 1987, Teather 1992, Troy and Baccus 2009). These factors may have contributed to the pair's ability to breed successfully at Nome. Additionally, the

Figure 1. Eastern Phoebe nest in a culvert under the Nome–Council Road on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska, 21 July 2016.

Photo by Bryce W. Robinson/USFWS

congeneric Say's Phoebe (*S. saya*) also nests on the Seward Peninsula beyond the limit of boreal forest (Schukman and Wolf 1998), suggesting together with this breeding of the Eastern Phoebe, that members of this genus may occupy an ecological niche more flexible or broader than do many other tyrannids.

The Eastern Phoebe is socially monogamous, with high fidelity to a nest site and mate, and it regularly rebuilds and reuses nest structures in the same territory in successive years (Greenwood and Harvey 1982, Beheler et al. 2003). Given these tendencies, it is just possible that this pair may return to Nome. Anticipating their reuse of the nest site and regularly checking for their presence may provide remarkable detail to an already remarkable nesting record.

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Table 1 Alaska Records of the Eastern Phoebe

Date	Observation	Location; region[a]	Reference[b]
26 Jun–6 Jul 1990	singing male	Camden Bay; N	AB 44:1172
21 Jun 1993	one	Hyder; SE	AB 47:1140
18 Jun 1995	singing male	Mitkof Is.; SE	FN 49:965[c]
11 May 2007	singing male	Haines; SE	NAB 61:496
13 Aug 2009	one	Chitina River headwaters; S-C	B. Benter pers. comm.
20 Jun 2013	singing male	Yakutat; SE	NAB 67:639
25 May 2015	one	Utqiagvik (Barrow); N	NAB 69:468
2 Jun 2015	singing male	Yakutat; SE	NAB 69:470
14–16 Jun 2015	singing male	Nabesna Rd. ~7 km E of Glenn Hwy.; S-C	C. McIntyre in litt.
5 Jun–25 Jul 2016	nesting pair	15 km ESE of Nome; W	pers. obs.

[a]As outlined by Gibson and Withrow (2015): N, northern; S-C, south-central; SE, southeastern; W, western.
[b]AB, American Birds; FN, National Audubon Society Field Notes; NAB, North American Birds.
[c]Specimen; University of Alaska Museum 6711.

Figure 2. Fledgling Eastern Phoebe, one of at least three successfully fledged young present in willow thickets in the Hastings Creek area on the Seward Peninsula, Alaska, on 25 July 2016.

Photo by Lucas H. DeCicco/USFWS

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