

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: Western Warbling Vireo (*Vireo swainsoni*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): 1
3. Locality: Parish: Cameron
Specific Locality: Rutherford Oaks/Oak Grove in Creole
4. Date(s) when observed: Three occasions: 26 Dec 1993, 22 Jan 1994, and a date in between that I don't have records for.
5. Time(s) of day when observed: afternoon
6. Reporting observer and address: Paul Edward Conover, Lafayette LA
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s): Gary Broussard, John Conover
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Fine
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Filming through Kowa 77mm scope and Sony 8mm camcorder
11. Distance to bird(s): 20 yards at closest
12. Duration of observation: On and off for probably 10 minutes over several hours of trying to get in viewfinder.
13. Habitat: Chenier
14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation: The first time we saw the bird, it popped out of a live oak clump in response to a screech owl tape and then disappeared. The second time, we watched the bird seemingly scraping the wax off of tallow seeds but couldn't get video. The final sighting was expressly to document the bird and we spent and long time there and got longer looks as the bird foraged. Bird was actively and acrobatically feeding in trees (Live Oak and a large Magnolia that was present in a yard at that time) about 20-40 feet up with a combination of gleaning as it navigated along branches and short fluttering lunges for flushed insects. We got many looks at it, but finding it through the tiny viewfinder was really hard. The video I did get gives a good idea of the color, small size and gracile proportions, and quickness and agility of the bird.
15. Description: A very active, small, small-billed vireo without wingbars. When first seen was recognized as Warbling, but seemed very small, closer to Philadelphia than eastern Warbling in size. The size and proportions of the bird are somewhat apparent in the video, and the smaller individual features (head size, bill size) are readily visible in the stills.

Upperparts grayish green.

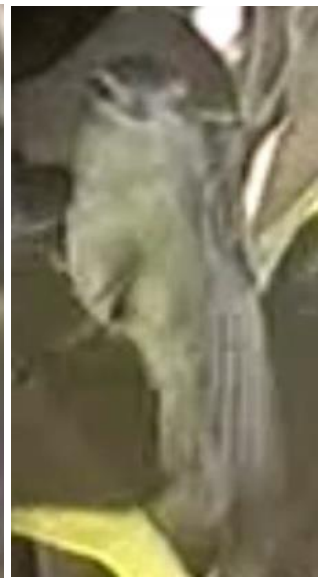


Underparts pale with dingy wash along flanks across sides of lower throat and upper breast, broad wash of pale lemon-lime-yellow from flanks.

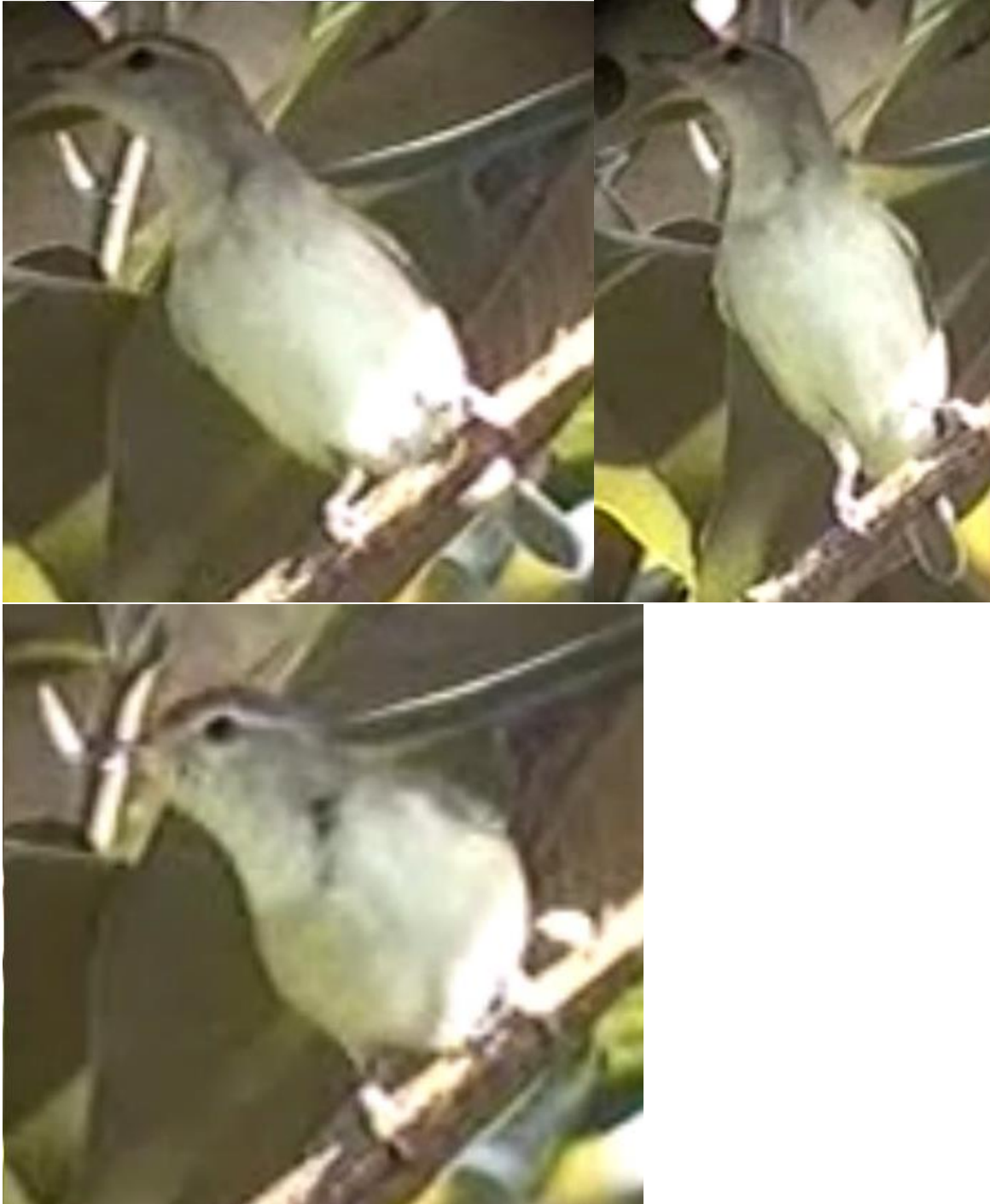


Whitish throat, grayish auriculars, and well-demarcated darker gray or possibly brownish-tinged crown with dark lower border contrasting strongly with the long, well-defined pale supercilia and diffuse pale suborbital crescent, producing a strong capped appearance. Crown darkest part of bird. Dusky eyeline behind eye, some duskiness before eye.





Head notably small, rounded, lacking the block-headed look often seen in eastern birds.



Bill short, thin, and narrow; upper mandible dark, lower mandible dark on tip.



Coverts with pale markings that may be normal pale edges or perhaps retained tips indicating a first-winter bird (in Western WAVI).



Bird was small and slight of build, along the lines of Philadelphia Vireo; almost warbler-like.



16. Voice: not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Clearly a warbling vireo, but with the recently adopted split of Eastern and Western Warbling vireos, Eastern Warbling Vireo is the species to be eliminated. Although there

is overlap between many features of both species, there are extremes individuals of both species, and this bird looks typical of the extreme for Western. Key points of separation between the warbling vireos are body size and mass, bill length and width, contrast of crown with mantle, and length and distinctness of supercilium. Westerns are smaller in length and mass, with short and narrow bills, long and distinct supercilia, and darker crowns that contrast with the mantle and face. In terms of color and pattern, Easterns are generally more non-descript, with more diffuse supercilia that peter out behind the eye, and with the crown and face the same color (head color only broken up by paler markings above and below eye). Every pro-Western visual feature is evident in this individual. This bird was petite and gracile, and seemed closer in size to Philadelphia than Eastern Warbling; the bill looks tiny in all dimensions in dorsal and lateral views. The strongly-capped appearance with long, distinct supercilia is an especially pro-Western feature; anecdotally, the head pattern was so strong that I looked in the trays at LSU to eliminate the possibility of vagrant vireo species such as Brown-capped, but the bird differed in several features from that species. Even though the visual field ID of Eastern vs Western is debated, I think the confusion rests with intermediate birds. This individual seems to have features that fall safely outside of the intermediate range and securely within the range of “classic” Western birds.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Video <http://losbird.org/lbrc/wavi.mpg> from which stills have been taken.

19. Previous experience with this species: Over the decades I’ve seen and photographed many Eastern and Western Warbling vireos and have studied differences between the two in the trays at LSU and in the field, expecting them to be split at some point.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

b. after observation:

- Remsen et al.’s 1996 paper on Louisiana vireos:
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2410&context=jfo>
- Cornell Birds of the World
- Pyle
- eBird, McCauley
- Carpenter et al. 2022: Genetic, bioacoustic and morphological analyses reveal cryptic speciation in the warbling vireo complex (*Vireo gilvus*: Vireonidae: Passeriformes):
https://academic.oup.com/zoolinnean/article/195/1/45/6407100?utm_source=chatgpt.com&login=false

21. This description is written from: I’ve watched this video hundreds of times since the day I filmed it.

22. Are you positive of your identification? Yes. This bird matches the classic phenotype of Western. In the early ‘90s I was making regular visits out west where Warbling Vireo was common and from that experience this looked like a western bird to me at the time. I had mentioned the 26 Dec sighting to the folks at LSU as Remsen et al were writing a paper on vireos of Louisiana and I knew winter records were important. Van was justifiably skeptical of the sighting without documentation, which made getting video crucial. I submitted the video to LSU without comment on subspecies soon after the sighting. Remsen agreed with the ID of Warbling Vireo and stated unprompted that the bird in the video looked like a western bird. When a split was proposed a couple of years ago, Remsen suggested taking another look at this record as a Western. Now that the split has actually happened, I feel confident submitting it as Western. While there is known overlap in many characters of the two warbling vireos, I think this individual is safely on the extreme side of size, bill size, and head pattern.

23. Date: Report completed 12 Feb 2026.

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? Yes

