

FIRST NESTING RECORD OF SAY'S PHOEBE (*SAYORNIS SAYA*) IN THE EAST KOOTENAY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) has a wide breeding distribution in western North America, from central Mexico to arctic Alaska and into the Great Plains (Schukman and Wolf 1998). In British Columbia, northern and southern breeding populations are separated by a gap of about 600 km (Campbell et al. 1997), as this species avoids heavily forested areas of the Pacific coast and boreal forest (Schukman and Wolf 1998). It appears to be a very localized breeder in the Southern Interior Mountains Ecoprovince of southeastern British Columbia, where coniferous forests predominate, presumably for a similar reason (i.e., the patchy nature of suitable nesting habitat). There, nesting has been confirmed only for the extreme southwestern part of the West Kootenay region, near Castlegar and Trail (Campbell et al. 1997), and recently (2001) in the Creston valley (L.M. Van Damme, pers. comm.).

In 2005, a pair of Say's Phoebes (Figure 1) nested in agricultural land near McMurdo, British Columbia (National Topographic System Map Sheet 82 N/2, 51°09' N, 116°47' W), the first documented nesting record in the East Kootenay. The nesting area is situated in the valley bottom of the Columbia River, within the Interior Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone (IDFdm2 variant), at an elevation of 800 m above sea level. The nesting area comprised open farmland (mostly abandoned pasture, garden, and lawn) with scattered paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*).

The nest was situated on a horizontal beam beneath the deck of a farmhouse, about 2 m above



Figure 1. Adult Say's Phoebe with food for nestlings at McMurdo, BC. 16 May 2005 (Mark Dascher). BC Photo 3205.

ground. When the nest was first discovered on 26 April, it contained a clutch of five eggs, which hatched on 7 May. Using an incubation period of 15 days (Campbell et al. 1997, Schukman and Wolf 1998) and a laying interval of one egg per day, backdating from 7 May produces a clutch initiation date of 17 April. All five young successfully fledged on 25 May, a nestling period of 18 days.

The phoebes produced a second clutch in the same nest, about 10 days after the first brood fledged. The second clutch, containing four eggs, was discovered on 13 June. All four eggs hatched on 23 June (backdated clutch initiation = 4 June), and four young successfully fledged on 12 July, a nestling period of 19 days. Fledged young from the first brood were frequently seen within the nesting territory while the second clutch was being incubated. Double broods are not uncommon in this species (Schukman and Wolf 1998).

We have few spring arrival records for the East Kootenay. Here the Say's Phoebe is regarded as "occasional" in the upper Columbia River valley (Ferguson and Halverson 1997) and "rare" in the upper Kootenay River watershed (Nicholson et al. 2003), and it is not observed every year. Three spring records from the Golden area – 14 March 1999, 1 April 2003, and 6 April 2004 – suggest a very early return, compared to other flycatchers, which is

consistent with the mid-April clutch initiation that we documented at McMurdo in the 2005 nesting season.

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