

Photo Salon

Ash-throated Flycatchers in Maryland

Figure 1. Maryland's first banded Ash-throated Flycatcher was caught and released on 9 November 2011 (here). It was captured during regular banding operations at Foreman's Branch Bird Observatory in Queen Anne's County on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Another Ash-throated Flycatcher was caught at the same location 30 November (Figures 4-6). Both individuals were aged as hatch-year birds by molt limits in the remiges. Ash-throated Flycatchers undergo an incomplete pre-formative molt that starts on the breeding grounds, is suspended during migration, and resumes on the wintering grounds. Figures 2 and 5 illustrate the extent of feather replacement in the wing between these two individuals. In the East, only three other Ash-throateds had been banded previously.

Figure 2. This image of the 9 November Ash-throated Flycatcher shows molt limits within and between feather tracts; two generations of feathers are evident. Primaries 1-5, tertials 8 and 9, and the inner greater and median coverts have been replaced during the pre-formative molt. The pre-formative molt was suspended during migration, resulting in the retention of primaries 6-10, secondaries 1-7, the outer four greater and median coverts, all primary coverts, carpal coverts, and the alula complex. Notice the lack of wear, darker brown feather and vane, and glossy sheen on the replaced feathers.

Figure 3. In this image of the 9 November Ash-throated Flycatcher, it is clear that replacement of the rectrices has been suspended during the pre-formative molt. The four central rectrices have been replaced. Note the difference in wear, shape, and quality between the two feather generations and how the rufous of the inner webs of the outer rectrices extends to the tip of the feather, similar to the pattern seen in Great Crested Flycatcher. Hatch-year Ash-throated Flycatchers show this pattern, but adults do not. Unlike this bird, most Ash-throated Flycatchers seen in the East in autumn have rectrices of the same generation.



Figure 4. Remarkably, a second Ash-throated Flycatcher was caught at Foreman's Branch Bird Observatory in fall 2011, this one on 30 November.



Figure 5. In comparison to the 9 November Ash-throated, this individual captured 30 November had replaced many more feathers during the pre-formative molt. Only secondaries 5 and 6 are retained, and all other secondaries and primaries have been replaced. All the lesser, median, and greater coverts, the carpal coverts, and the alula complex have also been replaced and show contrast with the retained juvenal primary coverts.

Figure 6. The 30 November individual had completely replaced all rectrices during the pre-formative molt. Note how the brown of the outer web extends into the inner web, wrapping around the rufous on the outer rectrix, typical of Ash-throated Flycatcher. Most November Ash-throated Flycatchers seen in the East have this tail pattern.

—Dan Small

All photographs by Dan Small.

