

**WILLOW FLYCATCHERS  
(EMPIDONAX EXTIMUS SSP)**

Federal/California status: Endangered/--



*Description*

Two subspecies occur within the San Joaquin Valley of California: the southwestern willow flycatcher ( *Empidonax trailli extimus* ) and the little flycatcher ( *Empidonax trailli brewsteri* ). *Empidonax* flycatchers are notoriously difficult to distinguish in the field and typically requires a vocal cue for positive identification. The song of the willow flycatcher resembles a sharp "fitz-bew" with the accent on the first syllable. These are small birds, about 5.75 inches (15 cm) long. They have grayish-green backs and wings, whitish throats, light grey-olive breasts, and pale yellowish bellies. Two wingbars are visible; the eye ring is faint or absent. The upper part of the bill is dark, the lower is light.

*Habitat*

The willow flycatcher is a neotropical migrant, thus occurs in California primarily between the months May-September. Both willow flycatcher subspecies occur in riparian habitats along rivers, streams, or other wetlands, where dense growths of willows and other plants grow. They nest in thickets of trees and shrubs. The nest is constructed in a fork or on a horizontal branch, about 3 to 15 feet (1 to 4.5 meters) from the ground. The willow flycatcher is an insectivore (insect-eater), taking insects while in flight or picking them from plants.

*Range/distribution*

The southwestern willow flycatcher was formerly common and widely distributed in California riparian areas, but is now considered rare to local in California riparian woodlands. This subspecies is known to nest along the South Fork Kern River in Kern County. The little flycatcher also was historically common and widespread in California up to 2400 meters in the Sierra Nevada, but is now rare to local in California mountain meadows. It is known to nest from Tulare County north, along the western side of the Sierra Nevada and Cascades.

Photo: Southwestern willow flycatcher, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, URL: [http://ventura.fws.gov/images/Swwf\\_WhiteMtns2.jpg](http://ventura.fws.gov/images/Swwf_WhiteMtns2.jpg), accessed June 6, 2002.

*References*

- Sedgwick, J.A. 2000. Willow Flycatcher ( *Empidonax traillii* ). In, *The Birds of North America*, No. 533 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). *The Birds of North America*, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- Grinnell, J., and A. Miller. 1944. *The Distribution of the Birds of California*. Cooper Ornithological Club, Berkeley, CA. 617 pp.