

FIRST RECORD OF THE PINE FLYCATCHER (*EMPIDONAX AFFINIS*) FOR ARIZONA AND THE UNITED STATES

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On the morning of 28 May 2016, Stejskal discovered an *Empidonax* flycatcher at Aliso Spring in the Santa Rita Mountains, Pima County, Arizona (31° 44' 08" N, 110° 48' 10" W). First hearing a distinctive "whit" note of an *Empidonax*, thinking it was likely from either a Dusky Flycatcher (*E. oberholseri*) or a Gray Flycatcher (*E. wrightii*), and realizing that either species would be unusual in southeastern Arizona in late May, he decided to locate and document the bird. Upon finding the flycatcher, he noticed that it appeared odd, appearing superficially like a Dusky but having an entirely orange lower mandible, as in a Western Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis* or *E. difficilis*). The bird also appeared to be investigating potential nesting sites, which would be unprecedented for either the Dusky Flycatcher or the Gray Flycatcher in this region of Arizona. That morning and afternoon, and the following morning, he photographed the bird extensively and recorded its call notes. Upon his return to Tucson on 29 May he sent both the photos and sound recordings to Chris D. Benesh and to Rosenberg for opinion and analysis. He suspected the bird was a Pine Flycatcher (*E. affinis*), with which he was familiar from the mountains of western Mexico. Benesh and Rosenberg compared the photos directly to photos published online of both the Dusky and Pine flycatchers and, more importantly, compared sonograms of the call notes of the Aliso Spring bird directly to recordings of both the Dusky and Pine flycatchers that they had recorded and uploaded to www.xeno-canto.org. After careful analysis, we agreed that the bird was indeed a Pine Flycatcher, representing a first record for Arizona and the United States. This record has been accepted by both the Arizona Bird Committee and the American Birding Association's Checklist Committee. We returned to Aliso Spring on 30 May 2016 to obtain additional photos and recordings. The bird was seen almost daily through 7 July 2016. It was evidently a female, as it built a nest by 6 June, was seen often sitting on the nest through 7 July (Figure 3), and was never heard singing, just giving call notes. Visits to the area on 8 and 9 July failed to reveal it.

In the field, identifying any *Empidonax* flycatcher by plumage alone is fraught with pitfalls. This individual was identified by a combination of plumage, structure, and, most importantly, analysis of distinctive call notes. The plumage was rather dull, mostly grayish olive, more like a Hammond's (*E. hammondi*), Dusky, or Gray than the brighter greenish Western. It had somewhat worn but distinct whitish wingbars and dusky underparts that were more yellow in the center of the lower belly and whiter on the throat. The eye ring was almond shaped, being more extensive in front of and behind the eye. The lower mandible was entirely orange, the crown distinctively peaked, and the primary extension relatively long, more as in a Hammond's than in a Dusky (Figures 1 and 2). While identifying confusing *Empidonax* species by plumage is always a challenge, each species has a distinct call note. This bird gave a distinct "whit" note, which was qualitatively very different the call notes of Hammond's or the Western flycatchers, as well as from most species of *Empidonax* breeding in eastern North America. Most similar were the Dusky and Gray, but the latter was excluded on the basis of plumage, a completely orange lower mandible, and behavior (the bird did not dip its tail). The distinction between the call notes of the Pine and Dusky Flycatchers is not obvious, even to a trained ear, but spectrograms show that the call

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Figure 1. Pine Flycatcher at Aliso Spring, Arizona. Note the overall grayish-olive coloration, the peaked crown, entirely pale orange lower mandible, and relatively long primary projection. (A), 28 May 2016; (B), 30 May 2016.

Photos by David Stejskal (A) and Gary H. Rosenberg (B)

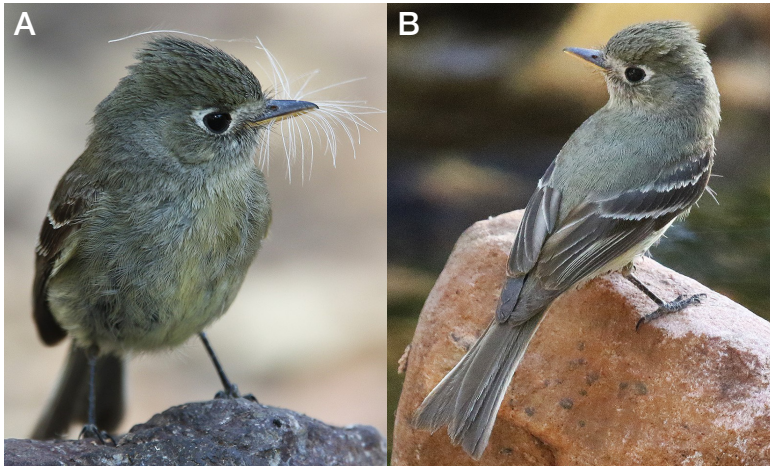


Figure 2. Pine Flycatcher at Aliso Spring, Arizona. (A) The bird collecting nesting material on 6 June 2016. (B) Photo taken on 4 June 2016 showing the upperpart coloration and long primary projection.

Photos by Laurens Halsey (A) and Greg Scyphers (B)

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Figure 3. Pine Flycatcher sitting on a nest on 24 June 2016.

Photo by Laurens Halsey

of the Pine is consistently and distinctly lower in frequency than that of the Dusky. Comparison of spectrograms of the call notes of the bird at Aliso Spring with those of both known Pine and Dusky Flycatchers show that it was indeed a Pine (Figure 4).

The Pine Flycatcher is found in pine-oak forest from southeastern Sonora and southwestern Chihuahua south through the mountains of Mexico to southern Guatemala (Howell and Webb 1995, Russell and Monson 1998, Farnsworth and Lebbin 2018). Although Russell and Monson (1998) listed only one specimen from Sonora,

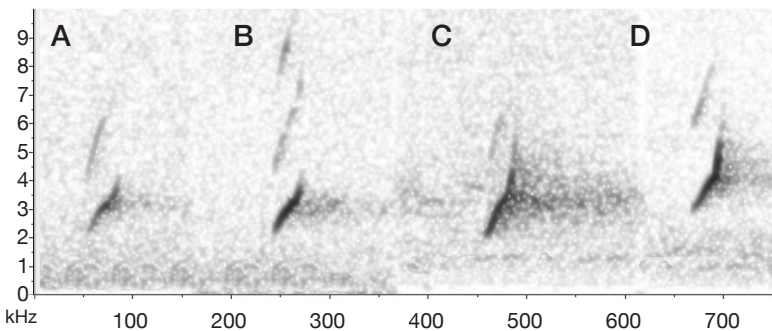


Figure 4. Comparison of call notes of the Aliso Spring Pine Flycatcher (A and B), a Pine Flycatcher recorded in Colima, Mexico (C), and a Dusky Flycatcher recorded in Oaxaca, Mexico (D), during the winter. Note that Pine Flycatcher's call is distinctly lower-pitched than the Dusky Flycatcher's.

Recordings by Gary H. Rosenberg (A) and Chris D. Benesh (B-D)

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more recent exploration in Sonora suggests that the Pine Flycatcher is regular in the Yécora and La India areas, some 350-400 km southeast of Aliso Spring (www.eBird.org).

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LITERATURE CITED

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