

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

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CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER

*Empidonax occidentalis*

Family: TYRANNIDAE  
B550

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: T. Kucera, 1997

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Former western flycatcher recently split into cordilleran flycatcher (*E. difficilis*), which breeds in transmontane California chiefly in the Warner Mts. area, and Pacific-slope flycatcher, which occurs in cismontane California (American Ornithologists' Union 1989). Contact zone between the two species is at Shovel Creek, Ikes Creek, and Little Shasta River, Siskiyou Co (Johnson 1980). Cordilleran flycatcher breeds in eastside pine, white fir, and lodgepole pine habitats in the Warner Mts. and vicinity, and may breed in White Mts. and on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada near Mono Lake and Mammoth Lakes, although breeding status in California is uncertain (Gaines 1988, Small 1994). Little is known of its migrational timing or distribution (Small 1994).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Probably similar to Pacific-slope flycatcher, which mostly eat flying insects; usually hawk from a perch, sometimes glean from foliage. Occasionally eat berries and seeds (Bent 1942)

**Cover:** Nest at higher elevations than do Pacific-slope flycatchers (Small 1994). Breeding habitat provided by cooler, denser boreal forests of pine, fir, and spruce.

**Reproduction:** Nest often built in crotch of tree, on cliff ledge or lava outcrop, in old building, or on other human-made structure (Small 1994).

**Water:** Probably similar to the Pacific-slope flycatcher, which is closely tied for breeding to riparian or moist areas, usually near water, throughout the state.

**Pattern:** Frequent higher-elevation pine, fir, and spruce forests with dense canopy during breeding season. Little is known of habitats during migration (Small 1994).

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Little is known of timing of migration (Small 1994). Probably arrives on breeding range in mid or late May and remains until September (Johnson 1973).

**Home Range:** No data found. Density of *E. difficilis* per 40 ha (100 ac) recorded as: 5-28 in a Colorado conifer forest (Beaver and Baldwin 1975), 11 males in a broadleaf evergreen forest in Alameda Co. (Cogswell 1973), 35 males in a California buckeye/California bay mixed forest in Marin Co. (Stewart 1973a).

**Territory:** No data found.

Reproduction: The closely related *E. difficilis* nest from May to August with peak activity in June. Nest solitary. Lay 2-5 eggs; average 3-4. May raise 2 broods per yr. Incubation 14-15 days, by female; altricial young fledge at 14-18 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Eggs and nestlings preyed upon by small mammals and snakes. Adults may be taken by accipiters.

Comments: Recent species split based upon range separation, vocalization and genetic differences (American Ornithologists' Union 1989). Other differences in requirements and life history not yet documented.

## REFERENCES

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.