

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Flycatchers



Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*)



gray upperparts

Lee Canyon; SMNRA; NV



white eyering

Lee Canyon; SMNRA; NV



short wingtips

Lee Canyon; Spring Mountains NRA; Nevada



paler below

Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Measurements:

Length: 6" Wing Span: 8" Average Weight: .33 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; gray above, whitish below (sides usually with yellow wash); dark wings, 2 white wingbars, **short wingtips**; longish, notched tail; dark eyes, **white eyering**; short, dark bill; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary; prefers lower montane elevations of open woodlands (especially Ponderosa Pine) of nw NA from AK south through the Rockies, wintering in Central America; aka **American Dusky Flycatcher**; insectivorous (beetles, flies, butterflies, etc.), sallying from low perches

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

The dusky flycatcher is very difficult to distinguish--even for experienced birders--from the almost identical **Hammond's Flycatcher**. Even their songs are quite similar! Generally, the dusky has **shorter wingtips** and a **longer** tail, but in the field, these traits are almost impossible to determine. Otherwise, the dusky is usually seen **lower** in the forest near clearings (like the ones shown above at Corn Creek in the **Desert NWR** in April, and Lee Canyon in the **Spring Mountains NRA** in August, both in 2021), while the Hammond's prefers to stay **higher** in the treetops.

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*)



RRCNCA; LV, NV



Red Rock Canyon NCA; Las Vegas, Nevada



RRCNCA; LV, NV



RRCNCA; LV, NV



RRCNCA; LV, NV

Measurements:

Length: 5.5" Wing Span: 8" Average Weight: .4 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; **olive-green above** (darker on wings, tail), buffy to yellowish below; 2 **whitish wingbars**; short, bi-colored bill (dark above, yellow below); dark eyes with **white eyering** pinched toward the back; pale patch in front of eyes; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary or in pairs; found in open forests (coniferous and mixed), usually near streams, in cordilleran region (Rockies, etc.) of NA from British Columbia south to MEX in winter; once considered conspecific with **Pacific-Slope Flycatcher** (*Empidonax difficilis*) as the "Western Flycatcher"; insectivorous, **hawking** from open perch

Mojave presence: migratory; isolated summer range

Comments:

While virtually indistinguishable in the field from the **Pacific-Slope Flycatcher**, the cordilleran can only be determined confidently by range. While these birds do overlap in their Mexican winter grounds, the cordilleran is primarily a summer visitor to inland habitats, whereas the Pacific prefers coastal mountains farther west. Uncommon in the Mojave, the bird shown here was unexpectedly spotted in low-elevation scrublands in the **Red Rock Canyon NCA** near Las Vegas in May of 2020.

Pty3

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

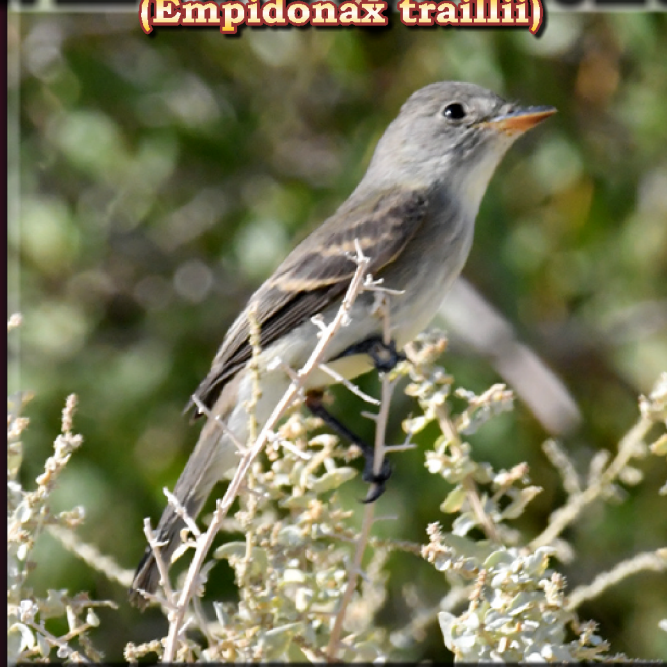
Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Measurements:

Length: 6" Wing Span: 8.5" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size, slender; olive-brown above (darker on wings, tail), whitish below with faint dusky chest; whitish throat and collar; 2 buffy wingbars; short, bi-colored bill (dark above, orange below); dark eyes, usually with a thin eyering; pale patch in front of eyes; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary or small groups; inhabits riparian deciduous woodlands (particularly containing willows) throughout most of NA (except se US) from s CAN to MEX, migrating south to Ecuador; once considered conspecific with Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) as the "Traill's Flycatcher"; 4 subspecies (sw *E. t. extimus* listed as Endangered); insectivorous

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

While common throughout its range as a species, the southwestern subspecies shown here is rare in the Mojave region and considered **ENDANGERED** overall due to habitat loss caused mainly by such invasive plant species as the **Saltcedar** (Tamarisk) *Tamarix ramosissima* that outcompete the flycatcher's favored trees (willows). It's always a thrill to realize you've seen a rare species!

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

Ash-Throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)



Dolan Springs; AZ



Valley of Fire SP; NV



Red Rock Canyon NCA; Las Vegas, Nevada



Red Rock Cyn NCA; NV



Valley of Fire SP; NV

Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: 1 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size, slender; brown upperparts, white breast, pale yellow belly; short crest on head; wings and long tail brown with **rufus highlights**; 2 dull wingbars; thick, dark bill; dark eyes; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary; found in desert scrub to open woodlands throughout w NA from CA east to w TX (rare elsewhere), c WA south to MEX, wintering in sw AZ, Baja and nw MEX; 2 subspecies; **sallies** from low perch for flying insects, getting all its water needs fulfilled from its diet

Mojave presence: summer range

Comments:

Ashies are rather talkative, active birds that prefer to frequent thicket-filled washes where insects are plentiful. While coy and flighty, teasing with their chatter as they taunt you to follow them as they flit from tree to tree, eventually they will reward your persistence with a stately photogenic pose worthy of any publication. The individuals shown here are of the nominate subspecies, *M. c. cinerascens*.

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

Vermillion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)



male

black above, red below

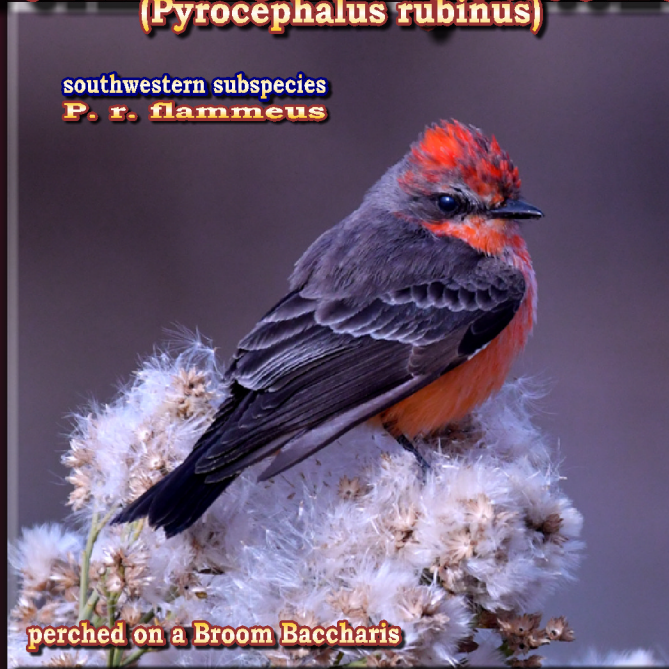
HBVP; Henderson, NV



male

sallying for insects

Overton WMA; Overton, NV



southwestern subspecies
P. r. flammeus

perched on a Broom Baccharis

Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson, NV



female

white breast

HBVP; Henderson, NV



female

pink belly

HBVP; Henderson, NV

Measurements:

Length: 5" Wing Span: 10" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size, stocky; short, black bill; dark eyes, mask; (m) bold brown to black upperparts, **bright red** head and underparts; short black tail; (f) brownish gray above, white breast with brown streaks, pink undertail coverts and wash on belly

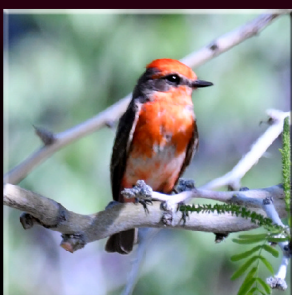
Notes:

common locally; solitary; prefers open woodlands and riparian areas (wetlands, marshes, ponds, oases, etc.) throughout MEX, north to sw US (rare elsewhere), south to nw SA; 9 subspecies; insectivorous, sallying from perch to catch flying insects

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

Though common throughout most of its range, the vermilion is far less so in the Mojave region. Even residents can be scarce. I usually only see them in the fall to winter at the locations shown above, but the young male at left made a rare spring appearance at Corn Creek in the **Desert National Wildlife Refuge** in April, 2021.



Pty6

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Flycatchers)

Olive-Sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Overton WMA; Overton, NV



Overton WMA; Overton, NV

Measurements:

Length: 7.5" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: 1.2 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size, slender; olive-gray above (head, crest, back, wings, tail), buffy to yellowish below with a **grayish vest**; white throat; no wingbars; long tail; bi-colored bill (gray above, yellow below); dark eyes, thin round eyering; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

uncommon; solitary; inhabits riparian areas in open shrublands to boreal forests in summer range that extends from the Appalachians of the US, north into CAN, west to Alaska, south to sw US, then migrates south to wintering grounds in Amazonian SA; **NEAR THREATENED** status; insectivorous, sallies from perch to catch flying insects

Mojave presence: migratory to summer range

Comments:

These flycatchers are quite uncommon in the Mojave region, but their namesake "vests" make them unmistakably recognizable when they do make an appearance. The individuals shown above in September of 2022 at the **Overton Wildlife Management Area** and **Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area** in Nevada are the only ones I have been fortunate enough to photograph.

Family TYRANNIDAE (Flycatchers)

Western Wood Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*)



Spring Mtns NRA; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Bosque del Apache NWR; NM



Bosque del Apache NWR; NM

Measurements:

Length: 6" Wing Span: 10" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-small size; dark brown gray above, lighter below, white throat and belly, pale **dusky vest**; long wings with 2 pale wingbars; long tail; dark bill with **yellow base on lower mandible**; dark eyes, thin eyering; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary; inhabits open, mature woodlands (deciduous and mixed) throughout western half of NA from AK south to c MEX, wintering in nw SA; insectivorous, sallying from perch to catch flying insects

Mojave presence: summer range; some year-round residents

Comments:

Many flycatchers are very difficult to distinguish one from another and confidently identify in the field due to their very close similarities. The best that one can do is get as good of pictures the birds are willing to present, then study the photos at home on a computer. In the case of the pewee, its "vest" can easily be confused with that of the **Olive-Sided Flycatcher** (page 7), but its wingbars and less yellow on the lower mandible are good tells.

Family TYRANNIDAE (Kingbirds)

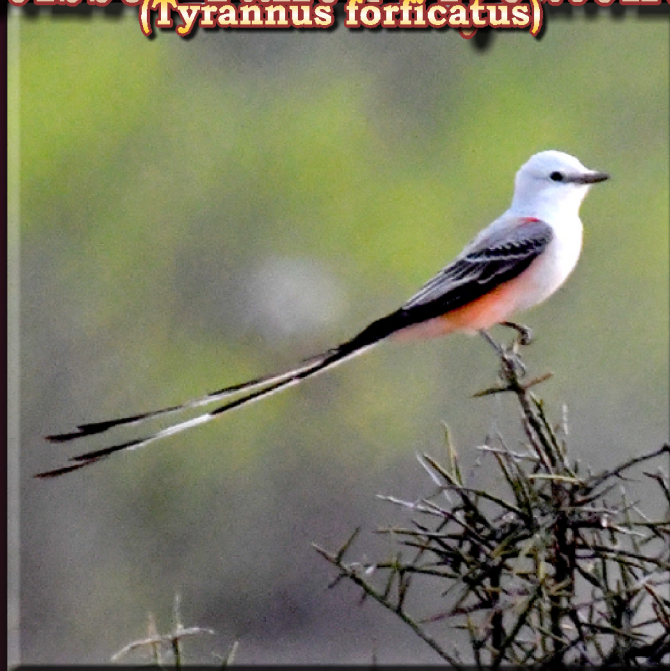
Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)



Sheffield Texas



Colorado City, Texas



Interstate-10 rest stop; Sheffield, Texas



Colorado City, Texas



Colorado City, Texas

Measurements:

Length: (m) 15" (f) 10" Wing Span: 15" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; pale gray head, back; dorsal wings dark gray; whitish breast; salmon-pink flanks and undertail coverts; long, **deeply forked tail** (white ventral, black dorsal trimmed with white); short black bill; dark eyes, eyeline; genders similar, though females have shorter tails and paler flanks; juveniles look similar to **Western Kingbird** (page 10)

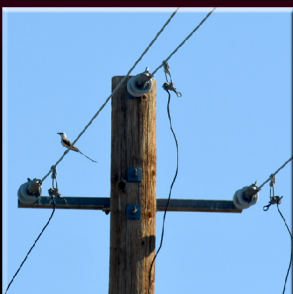
Notes:

uncommon; usually in pairs or small groups; prefers open habitats (fields, prairies, etc.) of sc US, ne MEX, wintering south to Panama (rare elsewhere); aka **Texas Bird-of-Paradise**, **Swallow-Tailed Flycatcher**; hybridizes with **Western Kingbird** where ranges overlap; mainly insectivorous (grasshoppers, butterflies, dragonflies, etc.), berries in winter

Mojave presence: rare; accidental

Comments:

Unfortunately for Mojave birdwatchers, these elegant flycatchers are very rare visitors to the region. The individual shown here is the only one I have seen in the area. It made a brief appearance at the **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve** in July of 2023.



Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Kingbirds)

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)



Corn Crk; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Crk; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Lee Canyon; SMNRA; NV

Measurements:

Length: 9" Wing Span: 15" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; light gray back, head, breast, darker wings, **yellow belly**; black tail with **white outer edges**; stout black bill; dark eyes and **mask**; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary or small family groups; very territorial; inhabits open woodlands to riparian areas in deserts throughout w NA in summer from s CAN south to n MEX, wintering in s FL and w Central America; mainly insectivorous, but sometimes also fruit and seeds

Mojave presence: summer range

Comments:

Typical of kingbirds, westerns are very territorial, and are often seen pestering much larger birds that encroach upon their domain, such as **Red-Tailed Hawks** and **Ravens**! The mates on the left at Bare Mountain near Beatty, Nevada, in May of 2020 are on the lookout for such intruders that may invade their nest for eggs. Of course, a tasty potential meal that wonders by is also always welcomed.



Pty10

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Kingbirds)

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)



City Lake; Tuskegee, AL



City Lake; Tuskegee, Alabama



City Lake; Tuskegee, AL



City Lake; Tuskegee, AL

Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 14" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; dark gray to black above, white below (including chin, throat); **squared black tail** tipped with white; no wingbars; stout, black bill; dark eyes; short black legs; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary or small family groups; prefers open areas near water with scattered trees (fields, pastures, prairies, wetlands, etc.) throughout most of NA in its summer range (except Pacific coast and sw US) from w CAN, east to the Atlantic coast, south to Gulf coast, migrating to central SA for winter; small red patch on crown is seldom seen; mainly insectivorous, **sallying** from perch to catch flying insects, but sometimes consumes fruit

Mojave presence: rare; migratory

Comments:

While these kingbirds seldom wander into the desert southwest, the rare stray does turn up every now and then. However, the only specimen I have ever personally seen was the one above at City Lake in Tuskegee, Alabama, in May of 2021. Its plumage reminded me at first glance of the **Tree Swallow** and **Black Phoebe** (page 14), but its white-tipped tail, flight, and hunting technique is distinctive enough to recognize this flycatcher.

Family TYRANNIDAE (Kingbirds)

Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*)



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Measurements:

Length: 9" Wing Span: 16" Average Weight: 1.5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-large size; dark gray above, yellow below; unforked **black tail tipped with indistinct white**; stout, black bill; dark eyes with **slight mask**; white mustache (sometimes just a pale patch); sexually monomorphic

Notes:

uncommon; solitary or small family groups; very territorial; prefers open country (prairies, savannas, desert scrublands, etc.) or open woodlands in central sw US (s NV, s UT, parts of sw CA/AZ/NM/w TX and elsewhere, south through much of MEX; 2 subspecies; mainly insectivorous, but also some berries and fruit on occasion

Mojave presence: summer range

Comments:

The Cassin's and **Western Kingbird** (page 10) are very difficult to distinguish from each other where their ranges overlap, especially considering the western is far more common in the Mojave than the Cassin's. Note the usually distinct white outer tail feathers of the Western (lacking in Cassin's). Also, the Cassin's presents a darker shade of gray on the head, back, and breast, and usually has a white "mustache" below the bill (though may be nearly absent in older birds). The individuals above at Corn Creek in the **Desert NWR** are the only ones I know of that I've seen and photographed.

Family TYRANNIDAE (Phoebes)

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)



enjoying the back 9

LV Municipal GC; LV, NV



Overton Wildlife Management Area; Overton, NV



pale rufous belly

Coyote Springs GC; Clark Co.; NV



gray upperparts

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; LV, NV



pale wings in flight

Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Measurements:

Length: 7.5" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: .75 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; gray above; paler gray breast, **peach-colored belly**; long black tail; juvenile has pale, buffy to whitish wingbars; sharp black bill sometimes with slightly hooked tip; dark eyes, dark eyeline; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; generally solitary; prefers dry, open country near water in western NA with summer populations in AK south to n MEX, year-round in s CA/s NV/sw AZ/s NM, wintering in s TX south to e MEX; 2 subspecies; insectivorous, usually **sallying** from perch to catch flying insects, but occasionally pounces on grounded insects

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

Though not as prevalent as many other species, the Say's is common enough that if you spend time where these birds are at home in the great outdoors, you will definitely get your pictures. This includes golf courses like the municipal course in Las Vegas (upper left) in July of 2018, and city parks such as Hemenway Park in Boulder City (right) the following August where **Bighorn Sheep** customarily provide secure perches for the locals.



Pty13

Family **TYRANNIDAE** (Phoebes)

Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*)



HBVP; Henderson, NV



Willow Beach; Lk Mead NRA



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson, NV



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 11" Average Weight: .7 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; dark gray to **black overall** except for **white belly** (forming inverted "V" on breast) and undertail coverts; long black tail; short, sharp, black bill; dark eyes; sexually monomorphic

Notes:

common; solitary or pairs; found in a variety of habitats, but always near water (streams, ponds, wetlands, etc.) in US from OR south to s CA then east to w TX (rare elsewhere), south to nw SA; relies on mud for nest building; 6 subspecies; mainly insectivorous, usually **sallying** from perch to catch flying insects, but occasionally takes insects from the ground, and small fish from ponds

Mojave presence: year-round

Comments:

These phoebes are conspicuous black-and-white flycatchers always seen near water, such as at the ponds in **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve** (left) in December of 2021, and Mountain Springs in the Spring Mountains (right) west of Las Vegas in July, 2019.

