

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER

Empidonax flaviventris

Location: My back yard at 10 Sedium Ct.; Pueblo; Pueblo County.

Date: May 28, 2000 (and possibly present on the 29th as well)

Recd 2/2/01 upl

5-2

6-1

Provisionally A

Setting:

I was sitting on my deck outside on the morning of May 28th. My house is in a residential subdivision on the north side of Pueblo with scattered large trees in the surrounding yards. It was a clear, still sunny morning. At about 6:20 a.m. I began to hear a singing *Empidonax* flycatcher. The song was similar to a Least Flycatcher (*E. minimus*) in that it was a two-note, repeated "chu-buck". It didn't sound right for a Least though, not being as rapidly delivered, or as insistent in quality. The bird was singing loudly and clearly from a tall cottonwood in the adjoining yard but I could not see it from my yard. I went into the house, grabbed my tape recorder and brought it out with the Peterson Eastern Guide to Bird Songs. I played both Least and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and the song was a dead ringer for Yellow-bellied. I brought my wife Vicki out into the yard and she heard the bird singing as well and agreed with the similarity to the tape of the Yellow-bellied. After about 10 minutes of singing from one of two trees about 50 yards distant, the bird stopped singing. It then began singing again from a 25 foot tall locust tree on the other side of my yard. It had moved there without my seeing it fly. I grabbed my binoculars and walked down the street to where I could see the tree from over a fence. It sang continually, but it took me about 2 minutes to finally locate it in the rather sparsely-leaved locust. It was perched only about 8 or 10 feet off the ground on the lower branches. I was able to observe it for about 1 minute, rather poorly at times, and never got a full, whole-body view of the bird. It kept to small interior branchlets and fed by fluttering in and around the leaves, gleaning insects from the leaf surfaces, much like a kinglet, rather than making clear, fly-catching sallies. It continued to sing while it fed. After a minute I lost the bird and it quit singing at that time. At 7:10 when I left for work it was again singing in the neighbor's yard on the other side of my house. I left it there. I listened the next morning, early, but did not hear it. My wife said she heard it singing again that morning (the 29th) after I left for work, about 6:45 a.m. I observed the bird in good sun from about 25 feet distance with my B & L 10 x 42 Elite binoculars. The relatively late date of this observation fits the pattern for this species in the east.

Description:

The song was loud – easily and clearly heard from about 50 yards away. Each song phrase was given in a repeated series with about 5-10 seconds between each phrase. After singing like this at intervals of 2-3 minutes, it would be silent for up to 3-5 minutes before resuming. The song was loud, but the song phrase "jur-buck" was not given as rapidly, insistently, or excitedly as I have heard Least Flycatchers deliver their song. Each song phrase was two-notes: "jurr-buc" – the first note ("jurr") burry and a little rough, perhaps better written "djurr". The second note ("buc") was flat, either slightly lower in pitch or nearly on the same pitch as the first note. The phrase was accented on the first syllable. The whole song phrase, "jurr-buck" was not as explosive or sharp as a Least Flycatcher. I heard no call notes.

I observed the bird for only about a minute. This was a small empid, but big-headed and short-tailed, with a moderate primary extension and a noticeably large bill for the size of bird. I saw the bill very well from underneath. It was large, wide, all orangish-yellow, with markedly convex sides. The bird was green-toned above, with a green nape. I did not see the head very well, as the observation was short and I was concentrating on the bill and chin. I did not see the breast and front/undersides well either, but the lower belly was lemon yellow. The eyering was complete, moderately strong and not obviously tear-shaped. I did not note the color of the eye-ring. The chin was strongly yellow. The wings were black with two very distinct wingbars, yellowish-white in color. This was a striking empid with its black wings, green uppersides and bright, sharp wingbars.

Similar Species:

Oh my god – all empids. The song is key to eliminating most species. Only Least is similar and I described how I think that it was different in the description above. Least's song has the second syllable at a higher pitch than the first note, and/or more emphasized. It is given more rapidly and excitedly. This bird's blackish wing with strong wingbars, yellow chin and throat, and large all yellow bill point to Yellow-bellied. "Western" Flycatcher is also strongly yellow-toned but has different song, is browner above, lacks yellow chin and has tear-drop shaped eyering. All other Empids have white or grayish throats with little yellow tint; different songs. Least Flycatcher is smaller, grayer, white or gray throated, has a short primary extension, and a small (tiny) bill.

Experience with Species:

I have seen all normal North American empids, but I have only seen Yellow-bellied once, in Maine in the summer of 1993.

This report is prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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