Cuban Pewee 73

Acadian Flycatcher 76

Willow and

Alder Flycatcher 82

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher 94
Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatcher 101

Hammond’s Flycatcher 110

Dusky Flycatcher 116

Pine Flycatcher 130
specific locations. Careful attention should be paid to weekly arrival contours as flycatchers tend to be faithful to arrival and departure dates from year to year. Fall birds may linger beyond the dates noted on the map.

We have also drawn arrows depicting approximate migration routes. Flycatchers of western North America typically follow the north–south aligning mountain ranges characteristic of the west. They may follow the foothills, canyons, or ridgelines. In most cases, arrival on northwestern breeding grounds, such as along the Pacific coast north to Alaska, is earlier than the same species’ arrival in the mountains of the continental interior (Montana, Colorado, Utah) as the rise in temperatures in these interior mountains in spring lags those of the more humid Pacific coast.

Flycatchers and pewees of eastern North America predominantly follow a western circum–Gulf of Mexico route along the Texas coast in both spring and fall. Small numbers of some species take an eastern route, hopping along the Caribbean islands between Florida and Central America. Trans-Gulf migration between Louisiana and the Yucatan Peninsula is probably rare. Because most of the spring migration of eastern flycatchers is dominated by the western circum-Gulf route, most flycatchers are rare or uncommon in the spring in the southeast as most turn northward along the upper Texas coast. In the fall, migration often includes a more easterly component such that certain flycatcher species that were rare in spring in Louisiana, for example, become common as a fall migrant. A fraction of these southbound birds may head down through Florida and to Central America, although most continue along the western Gulf of Mexico. Much more work is needed to unravel the nuances of flycatcher migration.
Troublesome Flycatcher

Breeding range
Winter range
Year-round range
Migration range
Vagrancy range

Arrival month
Arrival week
Migration direction

Montana

Vagrancy to Gulf Coast

Week 4 (May 22)
Week 3 (May 15)
Week 2 (May 8)
Week 1 (May 1)
Week 4 (Apr 22)
Week 3 (Apr 15)
Summary

While no single field mark is in general diagnostic, the combination of field marks forms a unique “fingerprint” for a given species, even when considering the intrinsic variabilities of individual field marks. We have tabulated these features for each species in the following FIELD MARK MATRIX and comparison plate. Use these as a cheat sheet to help you remember some of the salient features of each species.

We also provide a VISUAL SIMILARITY MAP, on which birds are arranged spatially according to how similar they appear. For example, Willow and Alder Flycatchers are nearly identical and thus displayed as overlapping fields. However, Alder Flycatcher shows some subtle similarities with Least Flycatcher, whereas Willow Flycatcher shows subtle similarities with wood-pewees. As another example, Gray, Dusky, Hammond's, and Least, in that order, form somewhat of a continuum. This visual similarity map was not derived from any phylogenetic considerations, but we note that some groups of visually similar species are indeed taxonomically related.
# THE FIELD MARK MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crown shape</th>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Peaked</th>
<th>Flat</th>
<th>Crested</th>
<th>Tufted Flycatcher</th>
<th>Olive-sided Flycatcher</th>
<th>Greater Pewee</th>
<th>Western Wood-Pewee</th>
<th>Cuban Pewee</th>
<th>Acadian Flycatcher</th>
<th>Willow Flycatcher</th>
<th>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</th>
<th>Hammond's Flycatcher</th>
<th>Least Flycatcher</th>
<th>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</th>
<th>your bird</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forehead angle</td>
<td>Shallow</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
<td>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</td>
<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill length</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
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<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
<td>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</td>
<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower mandible</td>
<td>All dark</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>All orange/yellow</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
<td>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</td>
<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tail length</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tail width</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
<td>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</td>
<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary projection</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingbar contrast</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
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<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
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<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Wing panel contrast</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Least Flycatcher</td>
<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye-ring</td>
<td>Indistinct</td>
<td>Messy, distinct</td>
<td>Bold, crisp</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
<td>Acadian Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Buff-breasted Flycatcher</td>
<td>your bird</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Upper/underpart contrast</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
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<td>Willow Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Hammond's Flycatcher</td>
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<td>Often</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Tufted Flycatcher</td>
<td>Olive-sided Flycatcher</td>
<td>Greater Pewee</td>
<td>Western Wood-Pewee</td>
<td>Cuban Pewee</td>
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HOLISTIC APPROACH
STRUCTURE, PLUMAGE, AND VOICE

WESTERN BIRDS

Greater Pewee

Western Wood-Pewee

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Pacific-slope Flycatcher

Least Flycatcher

Hammond’s Flycatcher

Dusky Flycatcher

Gray Flycatcher

Willow Flycatcher
HOLISTIC APPROACH
STRUCTURE, PLUMAGE, AND VOICE

EASTERN BIRDS

Eastern Wood-Pewee

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Least Flycatcher

Alder Flycatcher

Willow Flycatcher

Acadian Flycatcher

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
VISUAL SIMILARITY MAP

Similarities in the appearance of species are represented by distance between two species. Very similar species overlap. Dissimilar-looking species are more distant. Colors are meant to approximate overall coloration of a species, but have been exaggerated to enhance the effect.
Tufted Flycatcher
*Mitraphanes phaeocercus*
L 4.7–5.3” (12.0–13.5 cm), WT 0.3 oz (8.5 g)

**GENERAL IDENTIFICATION** The Tufted Flycatcher is unmistakable with its pointed crest and overall buff to cinnamon tones. Other distinguishing features are its small size, blackish wings, relatively bold white wingbars, lack of distinct eye-ring, small bill with entirely orange lower mandible, relatively long tail, and medium to long primary projection. The Tufted Flycatcher flicks its wings and tail but usually only just after landing. Its tail flicking is unique: a short but rapid succession like a fluttering or flickering, which makes the bird appear to shiver just after landing.

**VOICE** Tufted Flycatcher gives a variety of calls. It frequently gives a single note “pip” call. Tufted also gives a high pitched down-slurred whistle “peeur” similar to the “peeur” of Hammond’s, but at a higher frequency. Its song consists of a rapid succession of “pip” notes or a distinctive “chuwee- chuwee.” Each “chuwee” phrase is characterized by an initial downward inflection in pitch followed by a drawn-out burry up slur.

songs with rapid “pip” notes
TUFTED FLYCATCHER

prominent crest and orange face and breast

juveniles have broader buffy wingbars and pale fringes to upperparts

BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER for comparison
songs with rapid “pip” notes

distinctive “chuwee-chuwee” song

“peeur” call
RANGE AND HABITAT  Resident of pine and broadleaf forests in the mountains and foothills of Mexico south through Central America. It is a very rare spring/summer visitor (has nested) to the mountains of southeast Arizona and west Texas. There is one spring record (April 22, 2014) on the central Texas coast. It moves to lower elevations in winter, where it can often be found in desert scrub and riparian habitats.

SIMILAR SPECIES  Tufted Flycatcher is unlikely to be confused with any other flycatcher in the United States. Buff-breasted is of similar coloration, but it has a rounded crown.

TUFTED FLYCATCHER
Olive-sided Flycatcher

*Contopus cooperi*

L 7.0–7.9” (18–20 cm), WT 1.1–1.3 oz (32–37 g)

**GENERAL IDENTIFICATION** Despite its name, the Olive-sided Flycatcher is a type of pewee. Crested appearance; long primary projection; stiff, relatively short and wide tail; and strongly contrasting open-vested appearance across breast and sides are diagnostic. When not obscured by wings, pair of white patches on sides of rump are uniquely diagnostic. Tail has a subtle fork. Underparts are whitish, contrasting strongly with dark, somewhat open vest and dark upperparts. Undertail coverts are often marked with dark chevrons or ventral streaks. Juvenal plumage is like adult. Olive-sided rarely flicks wings or tail. It usually perches motionless and erect on tall dead snags protruding from the forest canopy. Adult prebasic molt is complete and occurs on wintering grounds.

**VOICE** Olive-sided has a distinctive whistled song often described as “quick-three-beers.” Call is a hollow sounding “pip,” often given in threes. Individual “pip” is like that of the wood-pewees, but slightly lower in pitch.

**RANGE AND HABITAT** Olive-sided breeds in the coniferous forests of western North America north to Alaska and east across the Canadian boreal forest and into the northern Appalachians. It winters in northern South America and is found throughout much of the United States during migration. It is very rare in the United States during the winter (most winter records are from California). Spring migrants arrive in California and east to Texas in late Apr., continuing into late May. In interior mountains of the west, nesting birds may not arrive until late May. Fall migrants pass through southwestern United States from early Aug. to early Oct. While widespread during migration, they are not usually seen in large
numbers. During breeding, it prefers forest edges with tall trees and snags.

**SIMILAR SPECIES** Olive-sided Flycatcher is unlikely to be confused with *Empidonax*. It can be confused with other *Contopus* species, but other pewees are uniformly dark across the chest/breast, have longer tails, and never have the open-vested appearance or whitish belly of Olive-sided.

---

**Hollow “pip” call**, often given in threes

---

**“quick three-beers” song**
OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

- Large dark brown/olive pewee with brown open vest, long wings, and limited wingbars
- Large robust bill with orange lower mandible
- Streaky brown vest compared with smoother unstreaked breast of wood-pewees
- Dark chevrons on undertail
- Can sometimes see the white tufts on back
- White belly
- Perches on tall dead snags

Short tail
Olive-sided

- More contrast between pale belly and vest
- Vest open and made of dark streaks
- Note dark chevrons on undertail unlike Empidonax
- Heavier bill with orange lower mandible
- Note bill size, white throat, darker vest; shorter tail on Olive-sided

Wood-Pewee

- Smaller, darker billed
- More even brown gray wash across throat and underparts
Olive-sided

Olive-sided has bulkier structure and bigger bill; may appear shorter-tailed, but from below both species can be very similar.

note darker, more contrasting and streakier patches on sides of breast

Olive-sided vest often incomplete

vest usually more complete across upper breast

Wood-Pewee

 smoother, paler
gray-brown vest with less contrasting dull throat and belly
OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER

Yukon

Newfoundland

S British Columbia

Ohio

Upper Texas Coast

SE Arizona

SPRING MIGRATION

S California

S Mexico

Colombia

FALL MIGRATION

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Greater Pewee

*Contopus pertinax*

L 7.1–8.0” (18–20 cm), WT 0.95 oz (27 g)

**GENERAL IDENTIFICATION** Greater Pewee is usually unmistakable. It is a large, olive-colored pewee with a strongly pointed crest, long and heavy bill, completely orange lower mandible, and very long primary projection. Wingbars are dull. Chest is usually dark olive, resulting in weak upper/underpart contrast. It very rarely flicks wings or tail. It generally sits motionless on branches beneath the canopy, rarely above the canopy. Periodically sallies out for insects. Adult prebasic molt is complete and occurs on summering grounds.

**VOICE** Its distinctive song is a whistled repertoire consisting of a series of short “perduit-perduit” phrases and a distinctive drawn-out “pew-pew-puWEEew,” often given the mnemonic “Jose-Maria.” Its call is a single short “pip” or “peeeur” similar to that of wood-pewees, but at a slightly lower frequency and with a slightly hollower tone. It often calls at dawn.

**RANGE AND HABITAT** The Greater Pewee is resident in the mountains of Mexico and Central America. Between early Apr. and late Aug. its range expands into Arizona and locally to the Davis Mountains of west Texas for nesting. It is a rare winterer in the southwest from California to Texas and is the only expected winter pewee in the United States. It prefers middle story to upper canopy of pine and oak woodlands.

**SIMILAR SPECIES** Only wood-pewees are likely to be confused with Greater Pewee, but note Greater’s longer bill, more pronounced crest, and longer tail.
GREATER PEEWEE

large, crested pewee with long wings and orange lower mandible

long tail

long, heavy bill with orange lower mandible

not vested like Olive-sided Flycatcher
"pip" call

clean "peeur" call

"Jose Maria" song
Western Wood-Pewee  
*Contopus sordidulus*
L 6.25” (15.9 cm), WT 0.46 oz (13 g)

Eastern Wood-Pewee  
*Contopus virens*
L 6.25” (15.9 cm), WT 0.49 oz (14 g)

**GENERAL IDENTIFICATION**  
Wood-pewees are separated from *Empidonax* by their slightly larger size, more slender and vertical posture, very long primary projection (saber-like), long bill, and wide tail. A combination of dark olive coloration, olive or dusky underparts, dull wingbars; inconspicuous or nonexistent eye-ring, presence of ventral streaks, and crested crown is diagnostic of wood-pewees. Wood-pewees rarely flick wings or tail. They often sit motionless on snags in or above the forest canopy. They tend to sally high and return to the same snag unlike *Empidonax* which often return to a different snag. Wood-pewees are often first detected by sound because they are highly vocal even during migration.

Visual identification of wood-pewees to species must be done with care and should be verified by voice whenever possible. Subtle plumage and structural differences may be used to hint at a possible out-of-range pewee. Western is darker, shows less contrast, and is subtly shorter tailed than Eastern. Slightly lighter underparts of Eastern give subtly stronger upper/underpart contrast than in Western. Both wood-pewees have dull wingbars, showing little contrast with upperparts. However, wingbars on Eastern can be slightly brighter than on Western. Upper and lower wingbars on Eastern are almost always of similar boldness or brightness, but on Western, the upper wingbar is usually duller than the lower wingbar.

Although there is overlap, Eastern tends toward a slightly shorter primary projection and a longer tail than Western: ratio of the primary projection (PP) to tail projection (TP) is greater in Western.
than in Eastern. Western tends to hold tail in line with its body and back, contributing to a straighter, more upright posture. Eastern often holds its tail slightly downward relative to its body, which, in combination with slightly more contrasting plumage, makes Eastern more reminiscent of an *Empidonax* than Western. Lower mandible is mostly orange in Eastern and dark in Western, but there is overlap. Neither species typically shows much of an eye-ring, but Eastern may occasionally show hint of an indistinct eye-ring. Both wood-pewees complete their prebasic molt on wintering grounds, although molt may begin on summering grounds. Some wood-pewees may be best left unidentified to species.

**VOICE** Pewee identification should consider all the above field marks collectively, but voice is the best way to be fully confident of an identification. Song of Eastern Wood-Pewee is a drawn-out slur “*PEE-a-weeeEEE*” with the last segment slightly rising. The Eastern Wood-Pewee song has a slight downward inflection in the middle of the phrase. Eastern Wood-Pewee call is a short “*pip*.” Western Wood-Pewee song is shorter and burrier, a descending or rising “*BREeeer*.” At dawn, the “*BREeeer*” phrase is often followed by a high-pitch twitter like that of Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*). Western Wood-Pewee gives a short monotonic “*pee*” call. Both species call and sing often at dawn.

**RANGE AND HABITAT**

**WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE** Western Wood-Pewees breed in the coniferous mountains of western North America, from Alaska south through the Rocky Mountains and Coast Range to the Sierra Madre of Mexico. Western Wood-Peeves primarily winter in northwestern South America although small numbers may winter as far north as southern Mexico. They frequent the upper canopy of shaded woodlands, often perching on dead snags in or above the canopy. They are often found around riparian habitats. Northbound migrants
arrive in southern California and Arizona in mid-Apr. with late migrants continuing into early June. In fall, migrants pass through California and Arizona as early as late July and continue through the end of Sept. They arrive on South American wintering grounds from early Sept.; the last remaining winterers depart north by early May. It is very rare in the United States in winter.

**Eastern Wood-Pewee** Eastern Wood-Pewees breed in deciduous and coniferous forests of eastern North America and winter in northwestern South America. They frequent the upper canopy of shaded woodlands, often on forest edges. Northbound migrants primarily take a circum-Gulf path through Texas with a smaller number cutting across the Gulf of Mexico from the Yucatan. A small number of spring migrants may transit through Florida by hopping the Caribbean islands. In fall, southbound migrants mostly reverse their spring migration routes, but a significant fraction migrates through Florida and across Cuba to reach Central America. Spring migrants arrive in the southern part of the United States by the second week of Apr. with migration continuing until the end of May. Arrival on northernmost breeding grounds is from early May. Southbound migrants reach Texas and Louisiana from mid-Aug., continuing to the end of Oct. with a few stragglers continuing into late Nov. Early Sept. is when the first birds arrive on wintering grounds with arrivals continuing into Nov. The last wintering birds depart their wintering grounds in Apr. It is very rare in the United States in winter.

**Similar Species** Olive-sided Flycatcher has more whitish ground color to underparts and has a shorter tail. Greater Pewee has a longer tail, much more pointed crest, and longer bill with completely orange lower mandible. Wood-pewees are often confused with dull-colored *Empidonax*, such as Willow, Alder, Hammond’s, and Dusky. However, wood-pewees have much longer primary projection, stronger crest, and longer bill.
WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE

- Gray breast creates vested look
- Little to no eye-ring
- Indistinct upper wingbar
- Very long primary projection
- Bill longer than Empidonax, lower mandible mostly dark
- Dark streaks on undertail
- Peaked or crested crown
- Juveniles have buffier wingbars
"pee" call

song with burry phrases

shrill, emphatic, burry
“BReeeeer”
WESTERN WOOD-PEEWEE

Yukon

S British Columbia

N California

SPRING MIGRATION

S California

SE Arizona

S Mexico

Colombia

FALL MIGRATION

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EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE

usually more yellow on lower mandible compared with Western

brown vest

upper wingbar similar brightness to lower wingbar

dark streaks on undertail

juveniles have buffier wingbars

large dark brown pewee with brown vest, long wings, and dull wingbars
“pip” calls

“pee a wee”

slurred “pee-a-wee” songs

“PEE a weeEEE”
Index

Back 10
Bar chart 39–41
Behavior 32
Bill length 14–15
Breeding 39–41

Circum-Gulf 39–41
Color 30–31
Coloration 30–31

Contopus
  caribaeus 73–75
  cooperi 52–57
  pertinax 58–61
  sordidulus 62–72
  virens 62–72

Contrast
  Upper/underpart 26, 27
  Wingbar 22, 23
  Wing panel 24, 25
Covert feathers 10
Crown shape 10, 11

Distribution 39–41

Edging, Feather 24, 25

Empidonax
  affinis 130–134
  alnorum 82–93
  difficilis 101–109
  flaviventris 94–100
  fulvifrons 147–151
  hammondii 110–115
  minimus 141–146
  oberholseri 116–121
  occidentalis 101–109
  traillii 82–93
  virens 76–81
  wrightii 135–140
Eye-ring 28, 29

Feather edging 24, 25
Field mark 43
Field mark matrix 43
Forehead angle 12
Flycatcher
  Acadian 76–81
  Alder 82–93
  Buff-breasted 147–151
  Cordilleran 101–109
  Dusky 116–121, 123–128
  Gray 135–140, 123, 124
  Hammond's 110–115, 123–128
  Least 141–146, 125, 126, 128
  Olive-sided 52–57
  Pacific-slope 101–109, 128
  Pine 130–134
  Traill's 82–93
  Tufted 48–51
Tyrant 5
Western 101–109
Willow 82–93
Yellow-bellied 94–100

Habitat 37
Head shape 10, 11

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Island hopping 39–41

Mandible
  Lower mandible color 16
Mantle 10
Microhabitat 37
Migration 39–41
  Circum-Gulf 39–41
  Trans-Gulf 39–41
Mitrephanes phaeocercus 48–51
Molt 33

Outer-tail feathers 18

Pewee
  Cuban 73–75
  Greater 58–61
Phylogeny 5–7
Primaries 10
Primary projection 20
Primary spacing 20

Range 39–41
  Breeding 39–41
  Summer 39–41
  Winter 39–41