

Contents

Preface 1

Introduction 5

How to Use This Guide 11

Myiarchus Flycatchers 45

Dusky-capped Flycatcher 64



Ash-throated Flycatcher 70



Nutting's Flycatcher 77



Great Crested Flycatcher 82





Brown-crested Flycatcher 89



La Sagra's Flycatcher 96

Kingbirds (*Tyrannus*) 101

Tyrannus (Kingbirds) 102

The "yellow-bellied" Kingbirds 111



Tropical Kingbird 115



Couch's Kingbird 123



Cassin's Kingbird 131

Western Kingbird 138



Thick-billed Kingbird 146



The “white-bellied” Kingbirds 151

Eastern Kingbird 152



Gray Kingbird 157





Loggerhead Kingbird 162



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 167



Fork-tailed Flycatcher 172



Kingbird Hybrids 179

Bibliography 184

Useful Websites 188

Index 189



Deciduous hardwood forests of eastern North America provide habitat for Great Crested Flycatchers. Point Pelee, Ontario.



Deciduous forests of the southeastern United States are frequented by Great Crested Flycatchers. East Texas.

Range, Seasonal Status and Migration

Unlike *Empidonax* and some *Contopus* pewees, whose breeding ranges extend into the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska, the breeding ranges of kingbirds and *Myiarchus* are more southerly: no further north than southern Canada. Many have breeding ranges primarily within the subtropics, and subtropical and tropical latitudes have the highest diversity of kingbirds and *Myiarchus*. Species diversity is greater in the western part of the United States compared with the east, where only the Great Crested Flycatcher and Eastern Kingbird are regular breeders.

Kingbirds and *Myiarchus* flycatchers are not a homogeneous group when it comes to migratory patterns. Most kingbirds and *Myiarchus* are short-distance migrants, migrating from breeding grounds in the United States to their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. Some of the lower latitude species, like Nutting's and Dusky-capped Flycatcher and several kingbirds (Thick-billed, Couch's, and Tropical) are largely resident in Mexico and Central America and only show local range expansions for breeding. Caribbean flycatchers and kingbirds are largely resident or only show local movements. Our only long-distance migrants are the Eastern Kingbird and Great Crested Flycatcher, which winter in the eastern Andes and upper Amazon of South America, respectively.

Range maps with charts showing migration timing accompany each species account. Purple corresponds to year-round status, orange to the breeding range, blue to the nonbreeding range and yellow to the migratory range. We have color-coded maps in terms of breeding, nonbreeding, and migratory ranges rather than by calendar season (e.g., fall, winter, spring, summer) because some birds range into the Southern Hemisphere where seasons are reversed relative to the Northern Hemisphere. In the Northern Hemisphere, breeding usually takes place from Apr. to July, whereas wintering occurs primarily from Oct. to Mar. For Southern Hemisphere birds, such as the South American subspecies of Brown-crested and Fork-tailed

Flycatchers and Tropical Kingbird, breeding and wintering take place in the corresponding periods of the austral year.

We have provided seasonal abundance charts in the form of bar graphs to illustrate migration (green) timing at representative locations or the probability of encountering a vagrant bird (red). In the range map, contour lines show arrival times for fall and spring migrants. Contours are shown with two-week intervals (biweekly): the beginning of the month is defined by a solid contour and the exact middle of the month by a dashed contour. Careful attention should be paid to arrival times as flycatchers and kingbirds tend to be faithful to arrival and departure dates from year to year. Fall birds may occasionally linger beyond the dates noted on the map or bar charts.

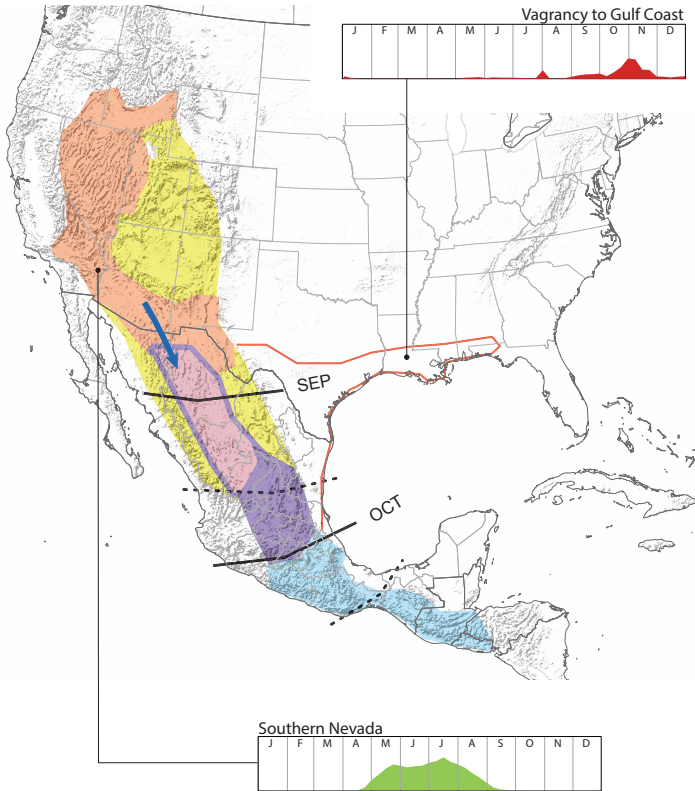
In some cases, we have drawn arrows depicting approximate migration routes. Flycatchers and kingbirds of western North America typically follow the north–south trending mountain ranges characteristic of western North America. In most cases, arrival on northwestern breeding grounds, such as along the Pacific coast, is earlier than the same species' arrival in the mountains of the continental interior (Montana, Colorado, Utah) because the rise in temperatures in these interior mountains in spring lag behind those of the more humid Pacific coast. Eastern flycatchers and kingbirds mostly migrate around the Gulf of Mexico, such as along the western coast of the Gulf of Mexico via southern Texas or by hopping across the Caribbean islands between Florida and Central America. Trans-Gulf of Mexico migration between Louisiana and the Yucatan Peninsula probably also occurs, but more work is needed to sort out the details.

Not surprisingly, vagrancy is frequently associated with first-cycle birds, which are less experienced. Thus, it is no surprise that the highest probability of finding a vagrant in North America is during the northern fall when young birds are embarking on their first migration. Most of the vagrant Tropical Kingbirds to the Pacific and Atlantic coasts are immatures, as are vagrant Great Crested Flycatchers to the Pacific coast. Southern Hemisphere birds are also prone to vagrancy. Post-breeding dispersal of Southern Hemisphere

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birds happens between Mar. and May, when they move north to their equatorial nonbreeding range. Some of these birds may overshoot and find themselves in North America. These are technically fall vagrants from a Southern Hemisphere perspective, but they turn up in the spring of North America.

GENERIC FLYCATCHER



- Breeding range
- Non-breeding range
- Year-round range
- Year-round (but uncommon in winter)
- Migration range
- Vagrancy range
- Arrival contour (at first of month)
- Arrival contour (mid-point in month)
- Migration direction

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Myiarchus Flycatchers

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Myiarchus Flycatchers

Identifying *Myiarchus* flycatchers

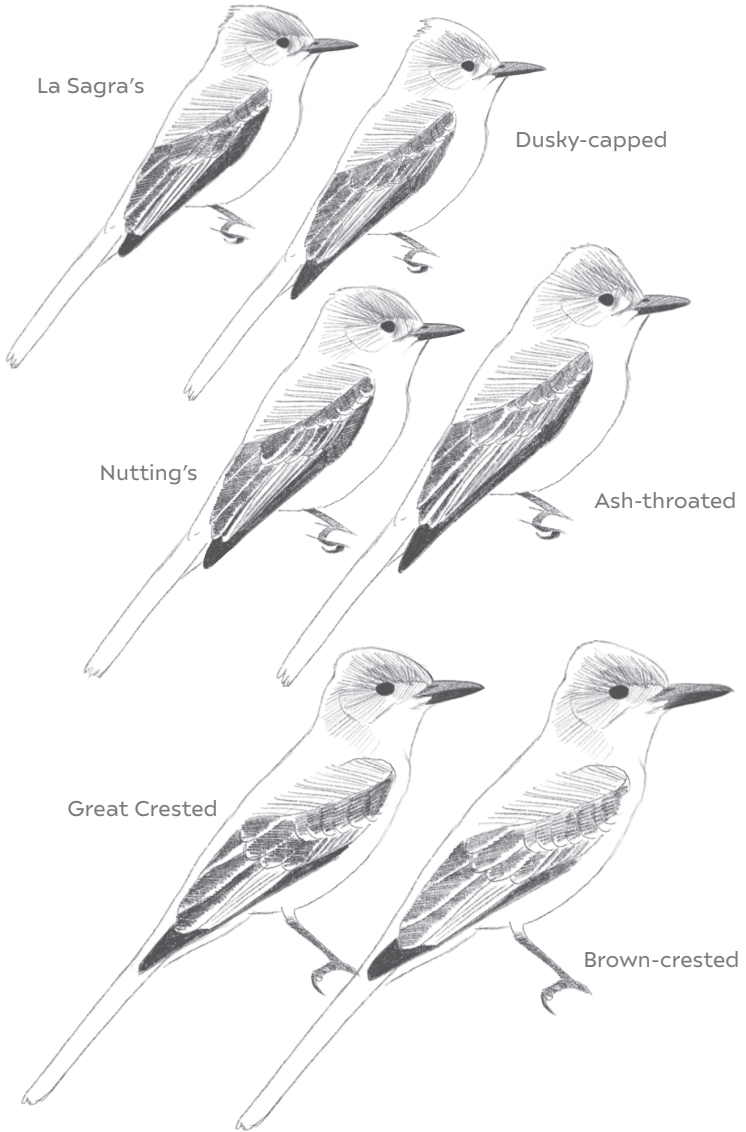
The *Myiarchus* flycatchers are medium to large members of the tyrant flycatcher family. They have duller coloring than kingbirds, but are more brightly colored than *Empidonax* flycatchers. *Myiarchus* flycatchers are generally gray to brown with yellowish underparts. The primary and often the secondary feathers in *Myiarchus* have bright outer edges, ranging from rufous to yellow. The tail feathers of most *Myiarchus* show some rufous on the inner web. Unlike *Empidonax*, *Myiarchus* flycatchers do not flick their wings or tails. *Myiarchus* flycatchers tend to perch less conspicuously than kingbirds, preferring perches beneath forest canopy or within and on the exterior of small trees and shrubs. Unlike kingbirds, the *Myiarchus* flycatchers do not form social groups. The next sections highlight the points to focus on when encountering a *Myiarchus*.

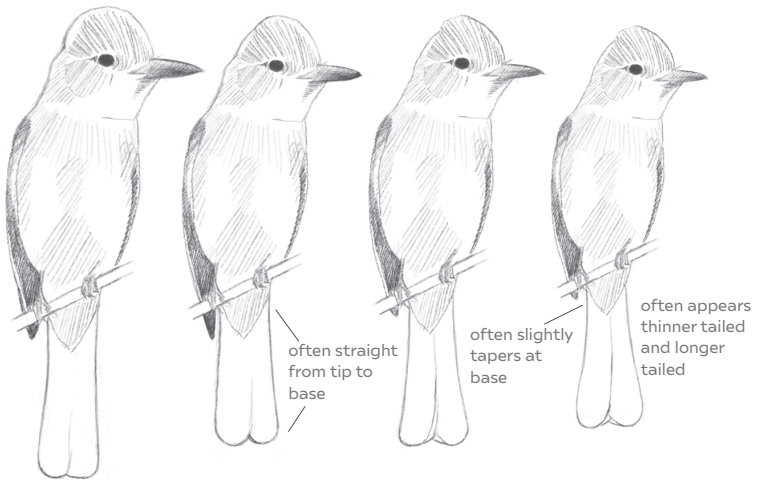
Size, Shape, and Structure

Body size and shape. *Myiarchus* species are generally similar in shape and structure, but note overall size and shape of a bird. For example, Brown-crested is large, big headed, and has a bulky body. Dusky-capped and La Sagra's have smaller, slimmer bodies. From largest to smallest, the *Myiarchus* flycatchers follow this sequence: Brown-crested, Great Crested, Ash-throated, Nutting's, Dusky-capped, La Sagra's Flycatcher. Beware of overlap between species.

Tail length. All *Myiarchus* have long tails, but there are subtle differences in tail length and shape. Great Crested has the shortest and widest tail. Dusky-capped has a proportionately longer and narrower tail. Narrow tails often narrow toward the body, whereas wider tails, like Great Crested, do not narrow as much toward the body. Of course, these features depend on how the bird is holding its tail, and there is overlap between species.

MYIARCHUS COMPARISON





Brown-crested

Great Crested

Ash-throated

Dusky-capped

Bill size and shape. Make note of relative bill size as there are subtle differences. Brown-crested has the largest and thickest bill. Dusky-capped and La Sagra's have the thinnest bills. Note the shape of the bill, especially that of the culmen on the upper mandible. Dusky-capped's bill is thin with a straighter culmen, whereas Brown-crested's bill has a thicker base and slightly more curved culmen. Ash-throated is intermediate in terms of bill characteristics. As in many field marks related to flycatchers, it is important to note that differences in bill size are subtle, and there is slight overlap between certain species. Finally, note whether the base of the bill (where the bill meets the head) is pale or dark. Great Crested and Brown-crested can often show slightly pale bases to the bill.

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note that bill length can be variable e.g., Great Crested, Ash-throated and Brown-crested *cooperi* can overlap



Brown-crested *magister*



Ash-throated



Great Crested



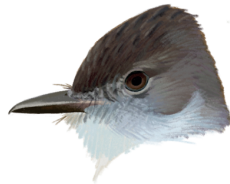
Nutting's



Brown-crested *cooperi*



Dusky-capped



La Sagra's

Crown shape. All *Myiarchus* have a slightly crested or peaked crown, but Dusky-capped and Nutting's tend to show slightly rounder crowns compared with Great Crested, Ash-throated, and Brown-crested. Note, however, that crown shape overlaps between species and may vary depending on a bird's posture.

CROWN SHAPES



Round

e.g., Dusky-capped Flycatcher



Peaked

e.g., Brown-crested Flycatcher

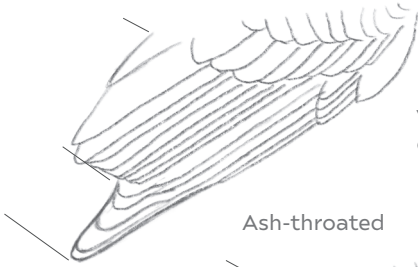


Dusky-capped with crown raised

Primary projection. *Myiarchus* flycatchers have relatively short primary projections compared with other tyrant flycatchers. However, subtle differences exist. Great Crested typically has the longest primary projection of *Myiarchus*, presumably because it is a long-distance migrant. La Sagra's, a relatively nonmigratory bird, has the shortest primary projection. Ash-throated's primary projection is intermediate. Primary projection should never be used alone for identification as there is overlap between species, but it can sometimes be a useful supporting field mark at the extremes.

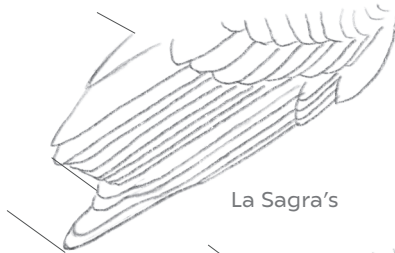
PRIMARY PROJECTION

Great Crested

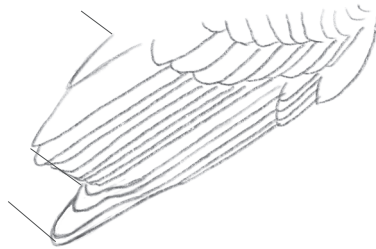


very subtle differences;
overlap exists

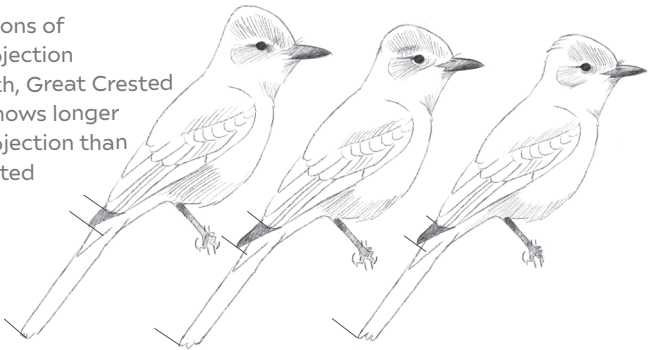
Ash-throated



La Sagra's



in comparisons of
primary projection
to tail length, Great Crested
generally shows longer
primary projection than
Brown-crested



Brown-crested

Great Crested

Ash-throated

Body Coloration and Plumage Contrasts

Intensity of yellow underparts. Although *Myiarchus* species are overall similar in body coloration, note how yellow the underparts are, and how dark the upperparts are. Great Crested has bright yellow underparts, Ash-throated has pale yellow underparts, and La Sagra's has whitish underparts. Dusky-capped and Great Crested have dark gray or brown upperparts, whereas Ash-throated has light gray-brown upperparts.

Chest contrast. In all *Myiarchus*, yellow underparts are confined to the belly, but the chest shows different shades of gray, generating different levels of contrast between the chest and belly. Make note of how dark the chest is, how far the gray extends down from the chest, and how much the chest contrasts with the yellow belly. Great Crested has a dark gray chest, but other species of *Myiarchus* have lighter gray chests. The gray on Great Crested is confined to the upper chest, but in Ash-throated, the gray extends to the lower chest before gradually transitioning into yellow. Make note of how sharp the transition between the gray chest and yellow belly is; for example, it is gradual and diffuse in Ash-throated and more demarcated in Great Crested.

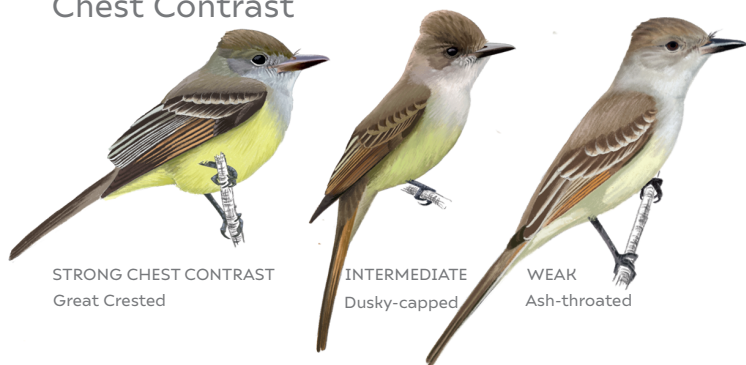
Head and face color patterns. Note the darkness of the crown, face, and throat relative to each other and to the gray chest. Are they concolorous or are they of slightly different color or darkness? Dusky-capped's crown and face are both dark, but the throat is pale and the chest intermediate, resulting in strong contrast between crown/face and throat/chest. In Ash-throated and Brown-crested, the face is intermediate gray, the crown is darker, and the throat lighter. Great Crested's crown, face, throat, and chest have similar gray coloring, resulting in less contrast and giving it a strong hooded appearance.

Body Coloration



La Sagra's Ash-throated Brown-crested Nutting's Dusky-capped Great Crested

Chest Contrast

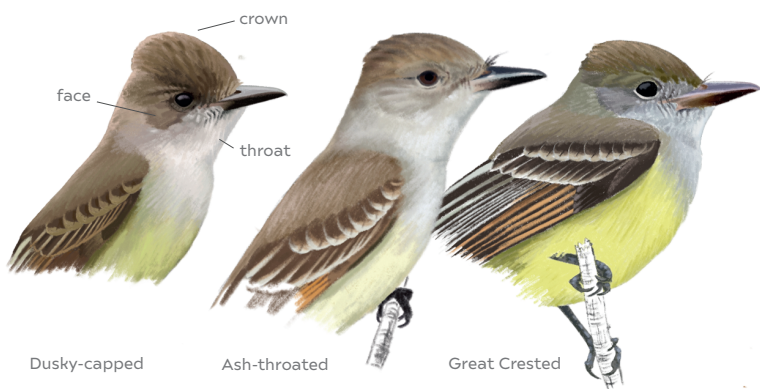


STRONG CHEST CONTRAST
Great Crested

INTERMEDIATE
Dusky-capped

WEAK
Ash-throated

Face Contrast



Dusky-capped

Ash-throated

Great Crested

Undertail Pattern and Color

Myiarchus flycatchers have variable amounts of rufous in their tails, ranging from limited to almost no rufous in La Sagra's and Dusky-capped to extensive rufous in Great Crested, Ash-throated, Nutting's, and Brown-crested. In those with extensive rufous, the outer-tail feathers have a dark brown **outer margin** (mostly on the **outer web** of the feather shaft) that often contrasts with a rufous **inner web** (on the inside of the shaft). The exact pattern of individual outer-tail feathers can be difficult to discern in the field unless the bird fans its tail long enough to be photographed. From above, all folded tails look dark because the inner webs of the outer-tail feathers are hidden beneath the central tail feathers. Make every attempt to observe the undertail because these outer-tail patterns are most easily seen from below.

The undertails of Brown-crested and Great Crested are characterized by a straight dark brown outer margin, with the rufous center of the undertail continuing all the way to the tip of the tail. Great Crested's dark outer margin is narrow and confined to the outer web (outside of feather shaft) whereas Brown-crested has a slightly broader outer margin (bleeding slightly over the shaft and into the inner web).

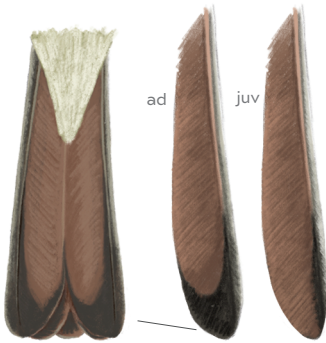
In Ash-throated and Nutting's, the dark outer-tail margins hook or widen inward toward the tip of the tail, bleeding into the inner web. In Ash-throated, the hooking is complete, resulting in a terminal bar across the tip of the folded undertail. In Nutting's, the dark outer margin of the outer-tail feathers widens toward the tip but does not cross the tip of the tail.

In Dusky-capped and La Sagra's, the outer-tail feathers are mostly dark, with rufous confined to the edges of the inner web. In these species, the undertail will often appear completely dark in the field.

Finally, note that for all species, juvenile tail feathers may show more extensive rufous than adults. This is most pronounced for juvenile Ash-throated, in which the extent of terminal hooking is diminished.

MYIARCHUS UNDERTAILS

There can be variation; in general, juveniles have more rufous



The outer-tail feather (R6) is the most visible feather from below



Ash-throated

dark brown usually hooks around tip



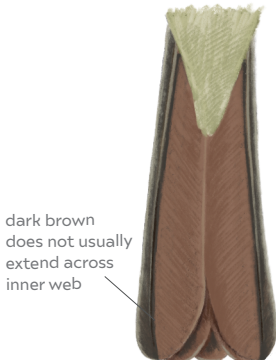
Nutting's



Dusky-capped



La Sagra's



dark brown does not usually extend across inner web

Great Crested



dark brown usually extends across inner web

Brown-crested

Wingbar Contrast

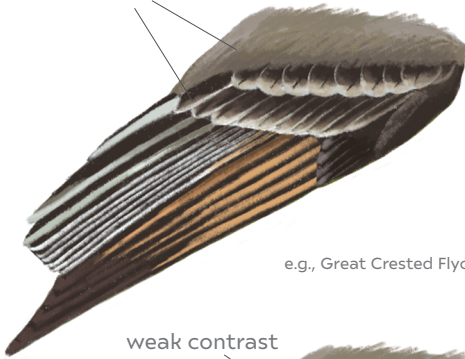
Wingbars are generally not conspicuous in *Myiarchus* flycatchers, but subtle differences exist. The extent of paleness to the edges of the median (upper wingbar) and greater covert feathers (lower wingbar) determines how conspicuous the wingbars are. A good way to assess the strength of the contrast is to compare wingbar brightness to the ground color of the wing and mantle. At one extreme is the Dusky-capped Flycatcher, which has very dull or nonexistent wingbars, showing little contrast with the mantle. On the other extreme is Great Crested, which shows bright wingbars (for a *Myiarchus*) that stand out against the mantle and wing. Note that wear, tear, and age can influence the boldness of wingbars and tertial edgings, and that primary coverts can be light brown to rufous on first- and second-year birds.

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WINGBAR CONTRAST

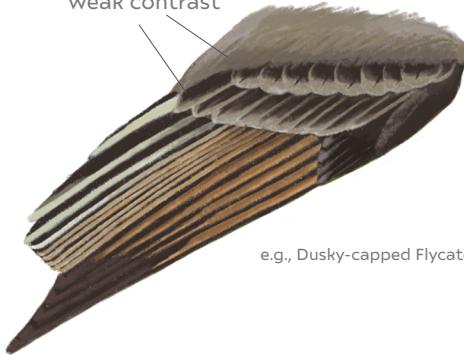
wingbar contrast with mantle and rest of wing

strong contrast

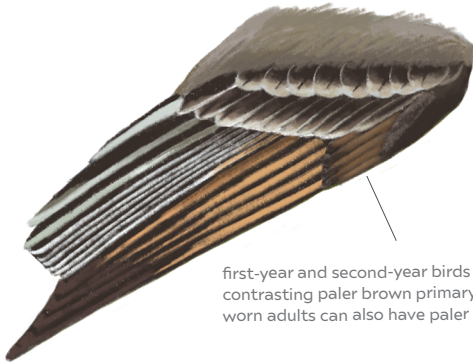


e.g., Great Crested Flycatcher

weak contrast



e.g., Dusky-capped Flycatcher



first-year and second-year birds can show contrasting paler brown primary coverts. Note worn adults can also have paler primary coverts

Wing Panel Contrast

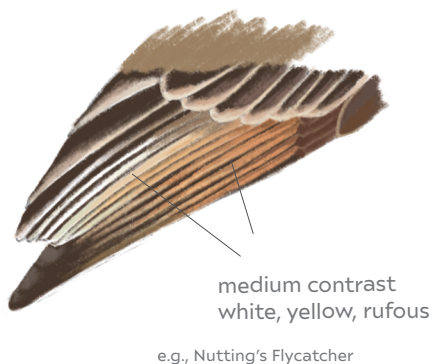
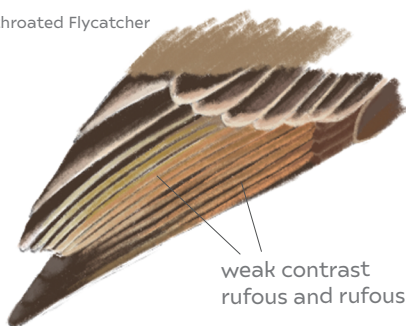
Pay close attention also to the *secondary* and *primary panels*.

These are the stacks of flight feathers on the folded wing. Both the secondaries and primaries have pale edges to their outer margins, but secondary and primary feather edges may differ in color, resulting in different contrast between secondary and primary wing panels (**wing panel contrast**). In Ash-throated Flycatcher, primaries have rufous edges whereas secondaries have whitish edges, giving a strong wing panel contrast (although juvenal Ash-throated may have rufous in secondaries). In Dusky-capped, both secondary and primary feather edges are dull rufous or yellow, resulting in weak wingbar contrast. In Nutting's, secondary feather edges grade upward from rufous to yellowish on the folded wing. Note that secondaries in juvenal plumage are often more rufous than in adult plumage. This is especially the case for Ash-throated and Great Crested.

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WING PANEL CONTRAST

wing panel contrast between primaries and secondaries



Vocalizations

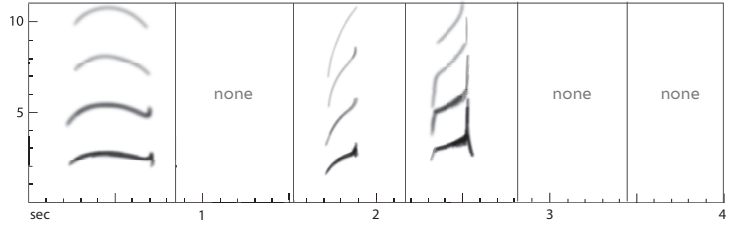
The most reliable way to identify a *Myiarchus* is by voice. Songs are made up of a series of call notes, so learning the call notes is recommended. In nonbreeding season, calls may be the only vocalizations given.

Calls can be classified into long (>0.5 s) and short (<0.5 s) calls. Long calls are best described as long, drawn-out notes. They can be pewee-like, as in the mournful “*peeEEew*” of Dusky-capped Flycatcher or the more cheerful and rising “*weep*” notes of Nutting’s and Great Crested. Ash-throated, Brown-crested, and La Sagra’s do not give long call notes.

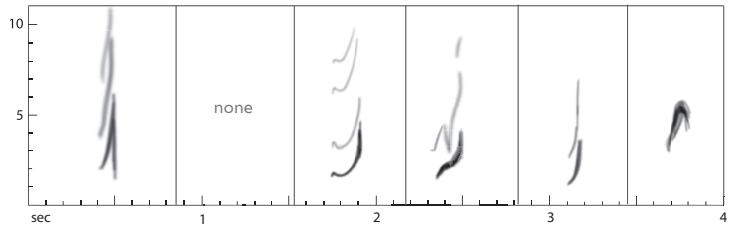
Short calls come in liquid “*whit*” notes, burry notes, and emphatic “*pip*” notes. Dusky-capped and Nutting’s do not give burry calls, but all other *Myiarchus* do. Some *Myiarchus* give “*pip*” calls (Ash-throated, Great Crested, and Brown-crested), but others do not (Dusky-capped, Nutting’s, and La Sagra’s). All *Myiarchus* give a variety of “*whit*” calls except for Ash-throated. There are subtle differences between the “*whit*” calls of different species. When listening to a “*whit*,” take notice of whether it is sharp and emphatic or more liquid. Use the call chart to help you identify your bird.

MYIARCHUS CALL NOTES

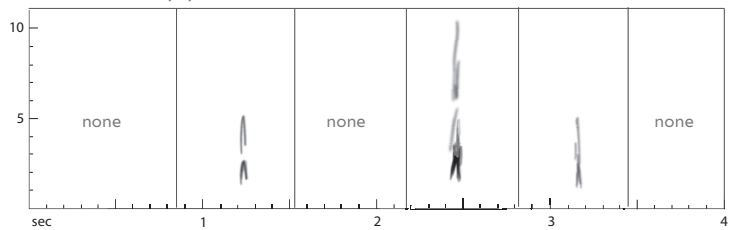
Long calls: "weep" and "peeEEuw"



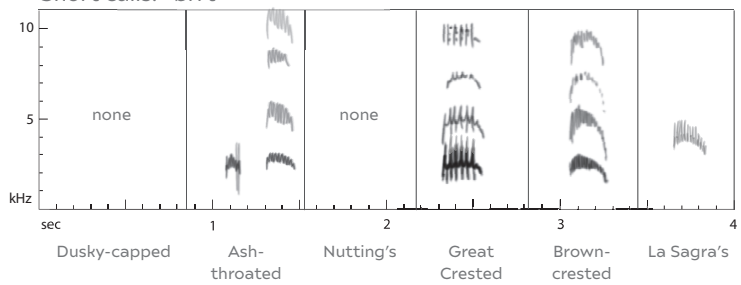
Short calls: "whit"



Short calls: "pip"



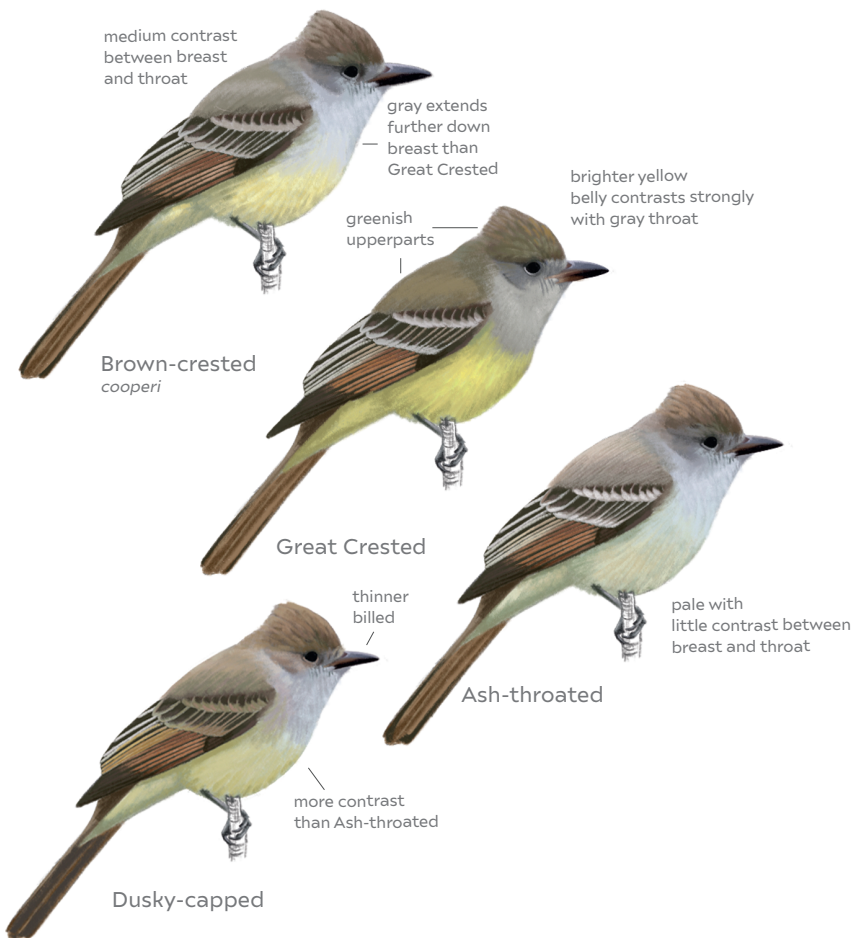
Short calls: "brtt"



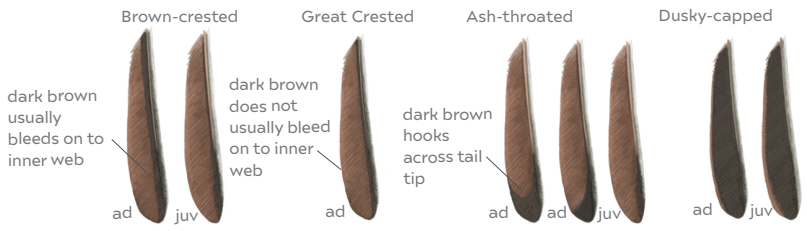
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MYIARCHUS COMPARISON

(regularly occurring in US and Canada)



Underside of outer-tail feather



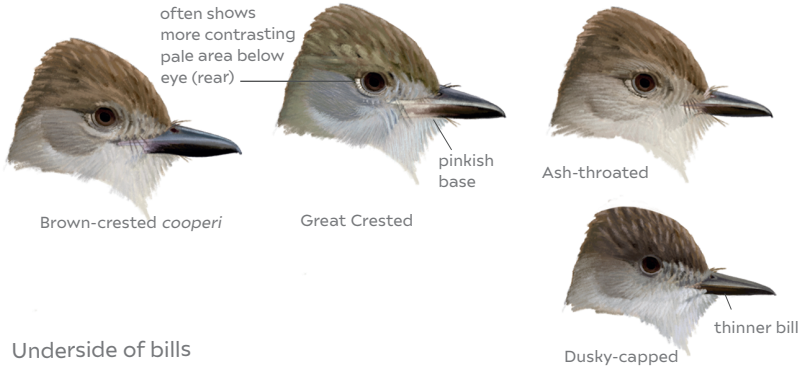
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MYIARCHUS COMPARISON

(regularly occurring in US and Canada)

Bill Size and depth

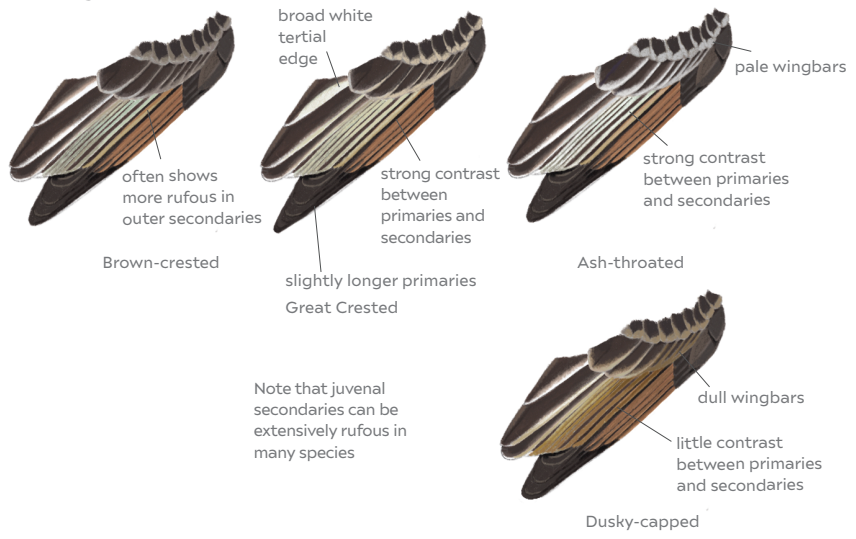


Underside of bills

bill size between Brown-crested cooperi and Great Crested can overlap



Wings



Dusky-capped Flycatcher

Myiarchus tuberculifer

L 6.3–7.3" (16.0–18.5 cm), WT 0.71 oz (20 g)

GENERAL IDENTIFICATION Dusky-capped Flycatcher is the smallest regularly occurring *Myiarchus* in our region. It is a shy woodland bird, perching or foraging at all levels, from just above the ground up to the canopy, often within vegetation rather than out in the open. Two subspecies occur in our region. The regularly occurring subspecies in Arizona and California is *M. t. olivascens*; *M. t. lawrenceii* occurs along the Caribbean slope of Mexico and Central America and is vagrant to southern and coastal Texas.

Dusky-capped has a slender build and relatively thin bill with a straight culmen. It has a proportionately long and narrow tail, which accentuates its slender appearance. Dusky-capped's tail often narrows toward the body. Its primary projection is relatively short. Its crown tends to be round, though occasionally it is slightly peaked. The crown, nape, mantle, and face are dark brown/gray (*lawrenceii* is darker above than *olivascens*). The chin and throat are medium gray, and the belly is medium yellow. The crown and face are similarly dark, contrasting with a slightly lighter gray throat and chest, which in turn contrast with the yellow belly. The wingbars are dull and similar in color to the mantle, rarely standing out (wingbars in juveniles or in adult *lawrenceii* can be more rufous). Unlike other *Myiarchus* flycatchers, which have whitish secondary feather edges, Dusky-capped's secondaries (except for the tertials) and primaries all have rufous or yellowish edges, resulting in weak wing panel contrast. Weak wing panel contrast characterizes *lawrenceii* as well, but the secondary and primary feather edges tend to be brighter rufous than *olivascens*. In both subspecies, the underside of the folded tail shows limited to no rufous, often appearing dark altogether (although in *lawrenceii*, rufous in folded tail may be more

evident). Prebasic molt commences on summering grounds but completes (flight feathers) on wintering grounds.

VOCALIZATIONS Dusky-capped's characteristic call is a mournful drawn-out whistled “*peeEEeew*,” rising and then descending (reminiscent of a wood-pewee). No other *Myiarchus* flycatchers in our region gives this type of call. Other Dusky-capped calls include a short rising “*whit*,” and a rapid somewhat burry series, “*tee-teerrrrrrrr-deew*,” often followed by a prolonged twitter. The latter is often given when it is agitated. Its song incorporates various combinations of call notes into a long series, “*peeew-tr-tr-drrr*” (“look, I’m here”), repeated over and over. It calls or sings frequently at dawn, although the mournful “*peeEEeew*” call can often be heard during the day, usually deep in woodland. Differences between *olivascens* and *lawrenceii* vocalizations are subtle, but “*peeEEeew*” call notes of *lawrenceii* are slightly lower in frequency than those of *olivascens*.

HABITAT, DISTRIBUTION, AND SEASONAL STATUS Dusky-capped is primarily a subtropical to tropical bird, whose range extends from northern Mexico south into the upper Amazon in South America. For most of its range in Mexico and Central America it is resident. In our region, it is mostly only a summer resident with a range restricted to the mountains of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico (common) and west Texas (rare). It prefers mixed pine-oak and sycamore-lined riparian woodlands in mountains and foothills. Breeding birds arrive in Arizona in late Mar., with most returning to Mexico by the end of Aug. (some stragglers may remain into Oct.). It is mostly absent from the United States in winter, but it is a regular vagrant to coastal California in late fall (a few have been recorded in coastal Oregon and Washington), with some overwintering (early Nov. to late Mar.). It is a very rare late fall and winter vagrant to southern Texas and

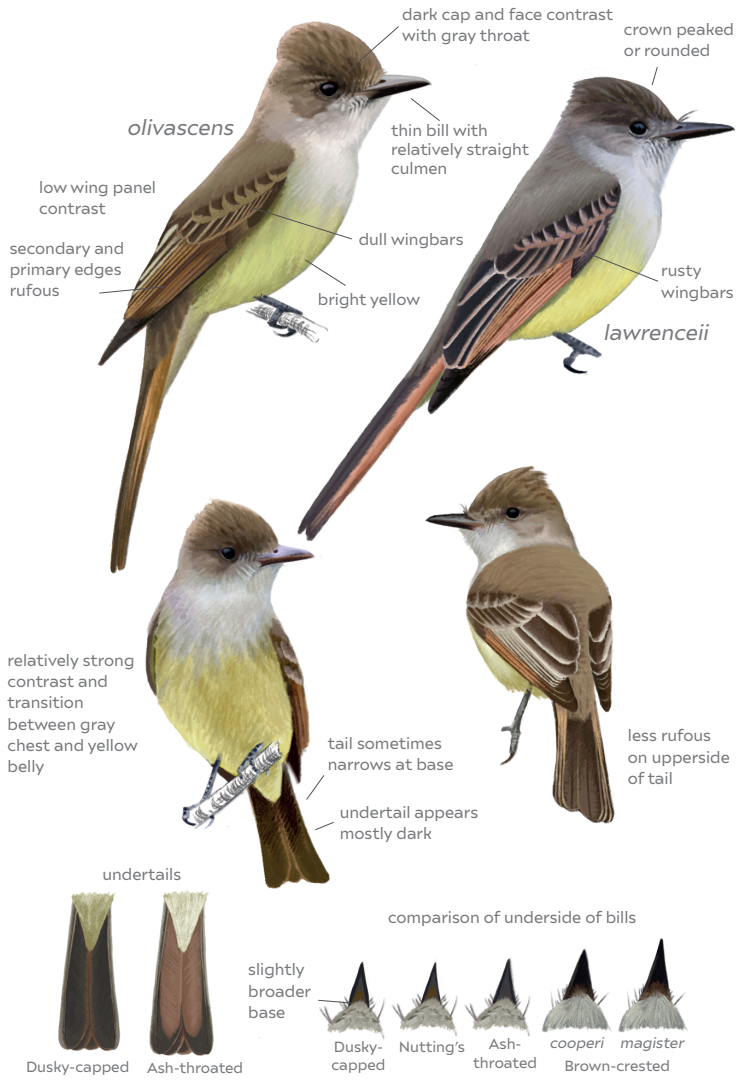
along the Gulf Coast. Vagrants are usually found in wooded areas, including suburban parks.

Breeding birds in Arizona and Texas, as well as vagrants to the Pacific coast, are of the western Mexican *olivascens* subspecies. Vagrants to southern Texas and the Gulf of Mexico coast are of the more brightly colored *lawrenceii* subspecies. Many other subspecies of Dusky-capped exist further south and into South America, but it is unlikely these subspecies wander to the United States.

SIMILAR SPECIES Dusky-capped differs from most other *Myiarchus* by its small and slender body, thinner bill, and proportionately longer and narrower tail. Dusky-capped is most likely to be confused with Nutting's and Ash-throated, which are only slightly larger. Dusky-capped, however, is much darker above and brighter yellow below than Ash-throated. The wingbars of Dusky-capped are dull, whereas Ash-throated and Nutting's have paler wingbars that stand out more against their mantles and wings. The limited rufous in Dusky-capped's tail when seen from below is generally diagnostic. Dusky-capped's face and crown are of similar darkness to Nutting's, but in Nutting's the face is slightly paler than its crown. Brown-crested is larger, bulkier, thicker billed, and has more rufous in the tail. Dusky-capped's narrow and long tail often narrows toward the body, whereas Brown-crested's tail does not usually narrow. Dusky-capped is the only *Myiarchus* to give whistled pewee-like calls.

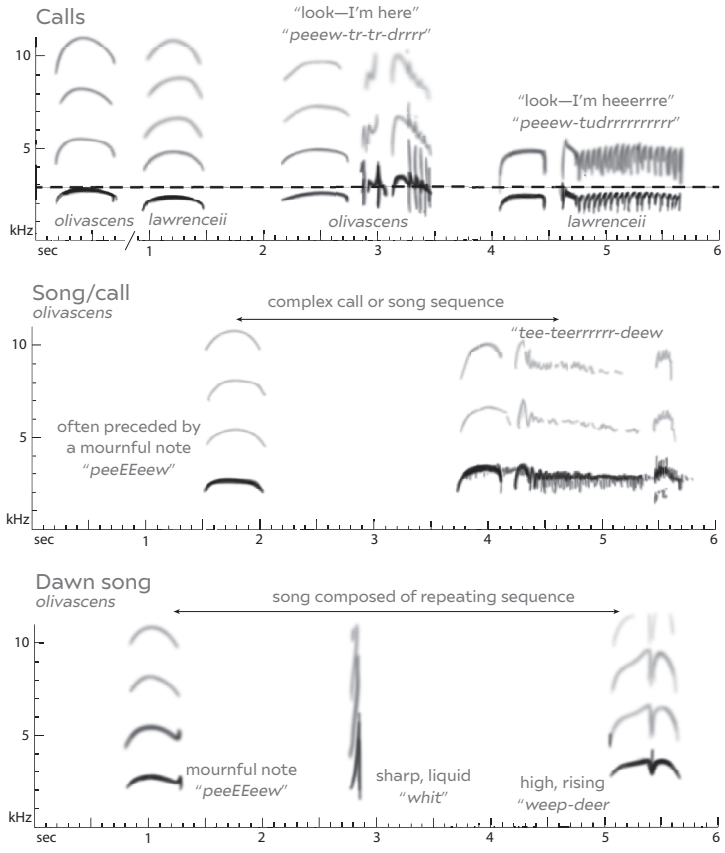
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DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER

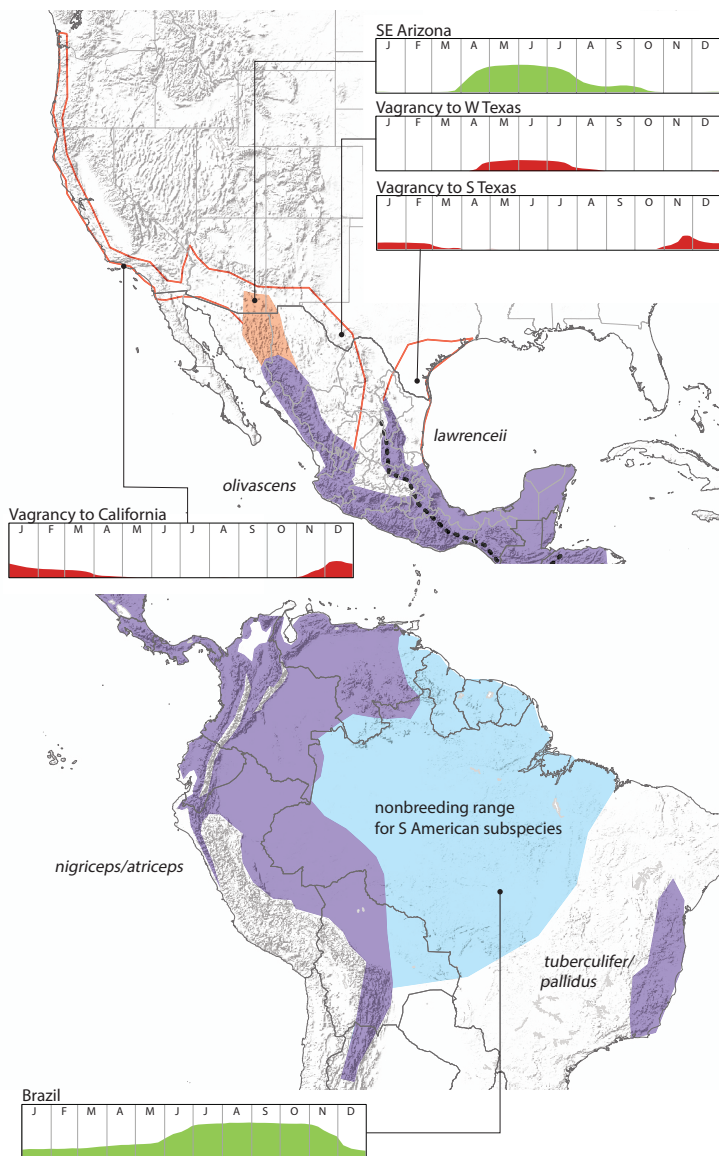


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DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER



DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER



Ash-throated Flycatcher

Myiarchus cinerascens

L 7.5–8.5" (19.0–21.6 cm), WT 0.75–1.31 oz (21.2–37.0 g)

GENERAL IDENTIFICATION The Ash-throated Flycatcher is a common summer resident of open woodlands, scrublands, and riparian areas of the western United States. During the breeding season, it frequently perches on and calls from the tops of bushes or trees. It is a medium-sized *Myiarchus* with a medium-sized bill. Its primary projection is variable but generally short, and its tail is relatively long. The bill is usually completely dark, but occasionally shows a pale base. The mouth lining, only seen when the bird opens its mouth, is yellowish or flesh-colored. Overall, Ash-throated is the palest of the regularly occurring North American *Myiarchus* flycatchers. It has a light gray to brown crown and mantle, and a pale gray throat and upper chest that grades gradually to a pale yellow belly. The pale throat shows weak contrast with its gray crown and pale yellow belly. The wing ground color ranges from medium brown to darkish brown, only slightly darker than the gray-brown mantle. The wingbars and tertial edges are whitish, but because the mantle and wing ground color are not dark, the wingbars and tertial edges show weak to medium contrast with the wings and mantle. The primary feather edges are conspicuously edged with rufous, but the secondary edges are usually uniformly whitish or very pale yellow (except for juveniles, which may have uniform rufous-edged secondaries), resulting in a strong wing panel contrast. The underside of the tail shows extensive rufous. Unique to *Myiarchus* is that the underside of the adult tail displays a narrow brown outer margin (confined to the outer webs of the tail feathers), which gradually increases in width toward the tip of the tail (bleeding over to the inner web of the tail feather), and then hooks strongly inward at the tip of the tail. On the folded tail, the dark hooking often extends across the tip of the tail, generating a dark terminal band across the tip of the folded undertail. Beware of juvenal

Index

- Adult 27
- Attenuated 12, 103
- Auricular 10
- Austral 30, 41

- Back 10
- Bar chart 41–43
- Bill 10, 103
- Bill shape 14, 48, 49, 103
- Breeding 27, 41–43

- Call 24, 60, 61, 108
- Circum-Gulf of Mexico 41–43
- Color 18, 106
- Coloration 18, 106
- Contrast 18, 106
 - upperpart/underpart 18
 - wingbar 20, 56, 57
 - wing panel 20, 58, 59
- Covert feathers 10
 - greater 10, 11
 - median 10, 11
- Crown shape 50
- Culmen 48
- Cycle
 - first 27–30
 - second 27–30

- Distribution 41, 43

- Ear patch 10
- Edging, Feather 20, 21
- Emarginated 12, 13

- First cycle 27–30
- Flycatcher 46
 - Ash-throated 70
 - Brown-crested 89
 - Dusky-capped 64
 - Fork-tailed 172
 - Great Crested 82
 - La Sagra's 96
 - Nutting's 77
 - Scissor-tailed 167

- Habitat 33–40
- Head shape 50, 103
- Hybrid 179–182

- Immature 27–30
- Inner web 12–13, 54, 55
- Island hopping 41–43

- Kingbird 102
 - Cassin's 131
 - Couch's 123
 - Eastern 152
 - Gray 157
 - Loggerhead 162
 - Thick-billed 146
 - Tropical 115
 - Western 138
 - "white-bellied" 151–178
 - "yellow-bellied" 111–149

- Lore 10

- Mandible 10
- Mantle 10
- Microhabitat 33–40
- Migration 41–43
 - circum-Gulf of Mexico 41–43
 - trans-Gulf of Mexico 41–43

- Molt 27–30
 prealternate 27–30
 prebasic 27–30
 preformative 27–30
Molt cycle 27–30
Myiarchus 46
 cinerascens 70
 cooperi 89
 crinitus 82
 lawrenceii 64
 magister 89
 olivascens 64
 nuttingi 77
 sagrae 96
 tuberculifer 64
 tyrranus 89
- Nesting 27–30
Notched 12, 13, 104, 105
- Outer tail 12, 54, 55
Outer web 12–13, 54, 55
- Phylogeny 5–8
Plumage 27–30
 basic 27–30
 formative 27–30
 juvenal 27–30
Primaries 12, 13, 58–59
Primary projection 12, 13, 50, 51, 104
Primary stack 12, 13, 58, 59
- Range 41–43
 breeding 41–43
 nonbreeding 41–43
Rectrice 12, 54, 55
- Seasonal 27–30
Secondaries 12, 13, 58, 59
Secondary stack 12, 13, 58, 59
Second cycle 27–30
- Shaft 12, 13
Song 24–26
- Tail 12, 54, 55, 108
 inner web 22, 23, 54, 55
 length 22, 23, 46, 54, 55
 outer margin 22, 23, 54, 55, 108
 outer tail 22, 23, 54, 55, 108
 outer web 22, 23, 54, 55, 108
 width 22, 23, 54, 55
- Taxonomy 5–8
Tertials 10, 11
Throat 10
Trans-Gulf of Mexico 41–43
Tyrannus 102
 caudifasciatus 162
 couchii 123
 crassirostris 146
 dominicensis 157
 forficatus 167
 melancholicus 115
 savana 172
 tyrannus 152
 verticalis 138
 vociferans 131
- Underpart 10, 52, 53, 104, 105
Undertail 22, 23, 54, 55
Undertail coverts 10
Upperpart 10, 52, 54, 104, 105
- Vagrancy 41–43
Vane 12, 13, 54, 55
Vocalizations 24–26, 60, 61, 108
Voice 24–26, 60, 61, 108
- Wingbar 10, 11, 56–57
 lower 10, 11
 upper 10, 11
Wing panel 20, 21, 58, 59
Wing panel contrast 20, 21, 58, 59