

# TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE      WYOMING      SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 225

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Subject: WESTERN FLYCATCHER\*

## General

The western flycatcher (Empidonax difficilis) is a common summer resident throughout this region and occurs at elevations up to 10,000 ft (3,000 m). It prefers valley bottoms near running water in mixed aspen (Populus tremuloides) and evergreen treelands throughout western Colorado.

## Food Requirements

The western flycatcher is insectivorous and consumes a wide variety of insects. One study identified the percent consumption of insects during two summers in western Colorado as: flies (Brachycera) (31 percent); beetles (25 percent); butterflies and moths (22 percent); wasps and bees (17 percent); bugs (3 percent); spiders (2 percent); cicadas, hoppers, aphids (1 percent).

## Water Requirements

The western flycatcher is associated with wooded streams. Close proximity to running water appears to be required by the western flycatcher in Colorado.



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\*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

#### Cover Requirements

Western flycatchers are found in mixed areas of aspen and evergreens, but not in pure stands of either. The most common trees utilized by the western flycatcher in southern Colorado and their average dbh (in, cm) were: aspen (9.6, 24.4); Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii) (9.9, 25.1); Englemann spruce (Picea engelmannii) (10.2, 25.9); and white fir (Abies concolor) (8.4, 21.3). The average number of trees with a dbh greater than 4 in (10.2 cm) was 232 per acre. Low shrubs and willow (Salix spp.) are utilized in association with riparian situations. Preferred habitat is characterized by a dense herbaceous understory that reaches a height of 2 to 3 ft (0.6 to 0.9 m) in late summer.

#### Reproductive Requirements

Nesting usually occurs in deciduous trees or shrubs such as aspen, willows, oaks, alders, and maples. Nests are placed in the upright forks of the main stem or in cavities of dead stubs. Canyon bottoms and stream courses are preferred nesting habitat. Nest sites in unoccupied buildings, canyon walls, and old mine shafts are also fairly common and involve a supporting structure with shelter from above. These nest sites are usually located near extensive wooded areas where the fledgling feed exclusively. Nesting sites are often used in successive years or for successive nestings within a single season.

The height of 29 nests in California averaged 10.9 ft (3.3 m) with a range of 0 to 25 ft (0 to 7.5 m).

#### Special Habitat Requirements

No special habitat requirements were found in the literature.

#### Interspersion Requirements

This species requires some sparse understory in the shade of tall trees of mixed growth.

#### Special Considerations

The western flycatcher winters in western Mexico and southern Baja California. Migration in Colorado occurs over the plains adjacent to the Rocky Mountain foothills.