

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <zoiseaux@lusfiber.net> .

1. English and Scientific names: [Western Flycatcher \(*Empidonax difficilis*\)](#)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): [1, juvenile plumage \(HY/FCJ\)](#)
3. Parish: [East Baton Rouge](#)
Specific Locality: [BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp](#)
4. Date(s) when observed: [24 September 2023](#)
5. Time(s) of day when observed: [9:15 am](#)
6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Erik I. Johnson
City: Sunset
State: LA
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): [Garrett Rhyne was the bander, as I observed; there were about 10 additional people present](#)
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): [none.](#)
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): [Sunny day. In-hand at banding station.](#)
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): [Photos taken with Samsung A52 smartphone camera.](#)
11. Distance to bird(s): [in-hand](#)
12. Duration of observation: [15 minutes](#)
13. Habitat: [Caught at mist net #24, which is on the transition between bottomland hardwood and swamp forest, in a ravine between two upload areas. Bluebonnet Swamp is an approximately 100-acre urban green space in Baton Rouge.](#)

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Bird was captured with a mist net at a constant effort banding station. There was an Acadian Flycatcher captured along side of it, suggesting a chase that resulted in the capture.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*):

Clearly an *Empidonax* flycatcher, the bird was yellowish with brown flight feathers not contrasting dramatically against tawny wing bars. First impression was of a very small Acadian (we had caught three Acadians already that morning), but the eye ring was a bit pronounced and tear-dropped shaped, body/wing proportions felt off to the eye, and there were aspects of the plumage body plumage that felt strange – notably, that the general impression was of a yellowish bird, more similar to Yellow-bellied, and not as greenish/olivish. We banded the bird (2970-85955) and went through the typical measurements including wing and tarsus, and then added tail, a couple of bill measurements, and some wing formula measurements, guided by the new Pyle (2023) guide. See Table below.

The bird had light fat (furculum <1/3 full, MAPS score 2), no body or flight feather molt, slight (minimal) wear of the outer 4 primaries (minimal fraying, no nicks), and a skull about 2/3 pneumatized. There were no molt limits among or between the secondary coverts, alulas, or flight feathers. These features collectively suggested the bird was in juvenile plumage, i.e., had not yet molted into its formative plumage, a trait shared by many fall North American *Empidonax*, with Acadian and some Leasts being the exception (Acadians and some Leasts molt on or near the breeding grounds before fall migration). Acadians should all be at least partially molted out of their juvenile plumage by now.

Garrett took the initial measurements, which is when we felt comfortable calling it a Western Flycatcher. I then repeated the measurements for confirmation.

Highlights in the table below show where other species' measurements diverged from the bird in question.

Measurement (mm)	Garrett Rhyne	Erik Johnson	WEFL (Pyle 2023)	ACFL (Pyle 2023)	ACFL (LABO)***	YBFL (Pyle 2023)
Wing	65	65	59-75	65-80	70.1 (61.5-78.0; 102)	60-73
Tail	58	56	51-63	50-62	55.7 (49.0-63.0; 39)	46-55
Wing-tail	7	9	4-16	12-21	13.3 (10.5-16.0; 38)	12-19
Tarsus	17.0	-	17.1-19.0	16.5-17.9	15.8 (14.7-16.7; 14)	15.7-17.1
Weight (g)	10.1	-			14.5 (10.3-21.4; 102)	
Exposed culmen	11.4	11.4	10.5-13.0	11.6-14.2	11.4 (10.1-13.5; 17)	10.1-12.2
Nares to tip	8.4	8.9	7.3-9.6	8.7-10.8	9.2 (8.0-10.8; 40)	7.0-9.4
P6-P10	6.1	7.0	4.7-9.8	-2.9-1.7	2.1 (0.0-4.6; 21)	1.9-6.3
P9-P5	5.0	5.0	2.8-9.8	8.6-14.4	9.5 (6.5-11.5; 12)	5.8-11.5
LP*-P6	2.2	2.8	0.2-4.4	5.2-9.3	6.7 (3.6-9.9; 29)	2.2-6.7
LP-LS**	11.9	12.0	8.6-17.1	13.3-23.5	15.2 (12.4-20.0; 27)	10.3-17.5

* LP = longest primary

** LS = longest secondary

*** LABO database showing average, range (min/max) in parentheses, and sample size following the “;”

16. **Voice:** Heard giving a very high short “seet” upon release. We had phones out ready to record, but the bird was already in the forest when it called, and it was pretty hard to hear, so I don’t believe any of the recordings picked it up (my recorder missed it). I was just listening to this call from a recording taken in MS a few days earlier of a Western.

17. **Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):**

The bird was too olive/green/yellow for Least, Traill’s (Alder/Willow), Gray, Hammond’s and Dusky Flycatcher.

See table above for comparison of measurements against Acadian and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers. Also...

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher would have a more contrasting black wing panel, as well as a broader gap between the greater coverts and the yellowish edging along the secondaries. The tear-drop eye ring also was somewhat inconsistent with YBFL.

Over the years, we’ve captured some small Acadians at our banding stations, but the wing formula of this bird was clearly an outlier, as was the relatively short tail. None of the measurements we took differed from the range of WEFL as summarized in Pyle (2023), whereas there were multiple measurements that fell outside the range of both ACFL and YBFL. (See also Table above).

There would be no way to distinguish between Cordilleran and Pacific-slope Flycatchers by measurements alone, but those two populations were re-lumped under Western Flycatcher by AOS in summer 2023. We did collect a single outer tail feather should genetic analysis ever be of interest.

18. **Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):** Yes, photos attached.

19. **Previous experience with this species:** I’ve seen Pacific-slope and Cordilleran out west several times, including good numbers during a visit to SE Arizona in spring 2021. I have also seen “Western” Flycatcher once in Louisiana. Just a few days earlier I was shared a photo of a mystery flycatcher from MS, which was intensely worn (thus different in plumage from this fresh juvenile), but hearing a recording of that bird’s call was good prep for this observation. This was the first time I have seen one in-hand.

20. **Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):**

a. at time of observation: Pyle (2023): North American Identification Guide Vol 1

b. after observation: None

21. This description is written from:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	Datasheet transcribed
<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: **Yes**.

23. Date: **18 October 2023, reviewed 26 November 2026 before submitted**

Time: **6:00 pm**

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page? **Yes**

If yes, may we include your name with the report? **Yes**







