

# SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER

*Empidonax traillii extimus* (Endangered Colorado, Federally)

**T**HE BANE OF BIRD WATCHERS, flycatchers are extremely difficult to identify from one another. The southwestern willow flycatcher is one of five subspecies of the willow flycatcher. They are small birds about 5 3/4 inches long with brownish-olive upper parts, whitish throats, pale olive breasts and yellowish bellies. Although the various subspecies appear similar in appearance, they are quite different in biology and habitat use.

Historically, the southwestern willow flycatcher was associated with southwestern wetlands, particularly the cottonwood-willow riparian habitats in the southwestern United State— California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and possibly Mexico. In Colorado, southwestern willow flycatchers occur primarily in the San Luis Valley and in suitable drainages in the extreme southwestern portion of the state.

The species is thought to occur in the extreme southwestern part of Colorado. However, breeding has never been documented.

As much as 90 percent of their preferred habitat has been lost or degraded. The federal listing rule stated the primary causes are urban and agricultural development, water diversion and impoundment, stream channelization, livestock grazing, invasion of exotic tamarisk or salt-cedar, off-road vehicle use, other recreational uses and the hydrological changes resulting from these and other land uses. Nest parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds (cowbirds laying their eggs in the nest of other bird species and in some cases even removing the host species eggs) further exacerbates the problem. Only 300-500 nesting pairs are believed to occur in all areas of their range.

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