

## And Who Is This?



**H**e doesn't look like much, just a little olive-grey-and-yellow bird—of which there seem to be dozens of different kinds! But put the "binocs" on him, find out who he is and what he does, and just like so many critters (from two legged on down) he becomes very interesting indeed! The fact that this one eats mosquitoes and other insects makes him of especial interest during the summer months . . . Yea! A non-lethal mosquito-zapper!

May we introduce The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Mr. *Empidonax traillii extimus*. In case his genus name, *Empidonax*, blew you away, it simply means "king of the gnats" in Greek, but his size is totally non-intimidating at 4¾ inches in length. He and his cousins are found all over our country, but it seems that in the Southwest they aren't found as

often as they used to be. In fact he got himself listed on the Endangered Species list of the Fish and Wildlife Service for not showing up often enough. As a result he gets to be surveyed and studied and photographed and listened for. *That's* how he gets found by the surveyors—by his song. Now, there are lots and lots of these guys across the nation but differing from one region to another by slight coloring variations or song patterns—that sort of thing. Ours got the part of his name *Traillii* from the person who first discovered him, whose name was Trail. See—it really isn't all that mysterious after all! (You're on your own about the "*extimus*"—write in and tell us what you know about that part).

Mr. *Empidonax traillii extimus* does inhabit our refuge. He arrives from Central America in May

and is here at least through July. Our wildlife biologists have counted twelve to fourteen in recent years. But they have made real efforts at Bosque to provide more habitat for this fellow by leaving (and encouraging) the willows in place so that he has a spot to settle into that is to his liking. In fact he is particular about coyote willows, preferring them to others.

The largest reason for his becoming endangered has been the elimination of about 90% of his former habitat in the Southwest—habitat altered or destroyed by human activities. During the breeding season these flycatchers choose dense streamside vegetation, with the female building their tiny cuplike nest under dense overhead shade canopy, anywhere from 3' to 25' above the ground. They like the forked niche between several upright stems or branches, and willows have lots of these toward their tops.

Blast the luck, these little winged bugcatchers seem to have "Welcome Cowbirds" posted over their nests, and that hasn't helped their numbers increase any. Ah, if only we hadn't killed off all the bison that were the cowbirds former hosts

Just for interest' sake you might enjoy knowing how the surveys are done. Biologists have to take special training in the identification of flycatchers since they can be tricky, indeed, to be sure about. A first survey is taken in May

when the males are busy singing and staking out territory. Just to be sure these birds are not merely passing through, the same area is surveyed mid-June and again in July. Can you picture biologists creeping along with binocs and field guides, sloshing through shallow ponds, slapping at mosquitoes along the river side (wishing for the flycatchers' aid), carrying tape recorders and playing the recorded *Empidonax* song, hoping for a response from a territorial fellow defending his air space. Oh, the dedication it takes! And the great results they get, too! Gradually they're finding better numbers and encouraging more cozy willow corners. And to these lovers of the outdoors (our biologists), it beats by a long way sitting at a desk shuffling papers all day!

Now back to that *extimus* thing: we found out—it means "outermost, most remote" in Latin, which says what early biologists thought about our great desert Southwest. Perhaps they just hadn't been here for one of our mild, sunny winters. *That* might have changed the designation to " *sunnimus*" or some such shining thing.

At any rate if you hear a hoarse-sounding *fitsa-bezv* or *feech-a-hew* followed by a *whit-whit-whit*, be on the lookout for a little 4¾ inch mosquito-eater all dressed in olive and pale yellow who likes to hang around the willows — and you will have seen an *Empidonax trailii extimus*. Go ahead, impress your friends!