THE NAME OF LAWRENCE'S FLYCATCHER
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ABSTRACT. – If Lawrence’s Flycatcher of Grenada, Trinidad, and northern South America is placed in the genus Lathrotriccus with the species euleri, it should be L. flaviventris (Lawrence) or L. euleri flaviventris, depending on rank. If it remains in the genus Empidonax, the specific name should be bolivianus Allen.

G. N. Lawrence (in Wells 1886 [=1887]) named a bird from the Lesser Antillean island of Grenada Blacicus flaviventris. The species was based on a single immature specimen, now in the U.S. National Museum, in poor (mutilated) condition. Blacicus Cabanis (type species Muscipeta caribaea d’Orbigny) was the generic name then used for the West Indian wood-pewees now placed in the genus Contopus. The species was maintained in Blacicus by Ridgway (1907). Later in 1887, Lawrence (1887) named Ochthoeca flaviventris based on a single specimen from an unknown locality in South America. Cory and Hellmayr (1927) suggested Trinidad as the restricted type locality, but included much of northern South America in its range. Ochthoeca (type species Fluvicola oenanthoides Lafresnaye and d’Orbigny) is a widespread genus of South American tyrant flycatchers.

Allen (1889a) named Empidonax bolivianus from a single specimen from an unknown locality in Bolivia. Allen (1889b) also reexamined Lawrence’s type of Ochthoeca flaviventris and concluded that it should be transferred to the genus Empidonax. The specific name flaviventris was preoccupied in Empidonax by Tyrannula flaviventris of Baird and Baird (1843), which had been transferred into Empidonax previously, so Allen renamed Lawrence’s flaviventris, Empidonax lawrencei. Ridgway (1907) maintained both bolivianus and lawrencei as extralimital species of Empidonax. Cory and Hellmayr (1927) suggested that the type of bolivianus was an example of Empidonax traillii brewsteri.

Barbour (1911) named Empidonax johnstonei from a single specimen from Grenada. He considered it to be derived from Empidonax lawrencei of Trinidad, from which it had “become differentiated in isolation to a considerable extent.” Cory and Hellmayr (1927) considered johnstonei as a subspecies of lawrencei. They considered Barbour’s johnstonei the same as Lawrence’s Blacicus flaviventris, with flaviventris preoccupied in the genus Empidonax. Bond (1936) also considered lawrencei and johnstonei conspecific. He noted that only two specimens of johnstonei were known, and suggested that it was merely a straggler on Grenada.

Zimmer (1939) considered the type of bolivianus to belong to the group of birds “formerly all included under the name lawrencei.” He recognized two subspecies in that group, bolivianus in Peru and Ecuador and (although not treated in that paper) lawrencei in Trinidad and Venezuela. However, he treated bolivianus and, by extension, lawrencei as subspecies of Empidonax euleri of southern South America. No reason was given for this merger, but Zimmer (1939) noted that the immature plumage of bolivianus was “not always distinguishable [in color characters] with perfect assurance from that of euleri or [e.] argentinus . . . .” Bond (1940) followed in treating lawrencei as a subspecies of euleri, and synonymized johnstonei with it.

Griscom and Greenway (1941) separated bolivianus from euleri and treated it as a subspecies of lawrencei. Pinto (1944) followed this treatment as Brown (1986) and ffrench (1991).

Meyer de Schauensee (1966) quoted a communication from E. Eisenmann on “the rather involved nomenclature of this species,” as follows: “Treatment of the E. lawrencei
complex as a species presents a nomenclatural question, for the little known name *bolivianus*
beams the same date, has the same authorship, and appeared in the same paper, with page
priority. Under the Code the selection of the specific name depends on the first reviser and
Pinto in using *E. lawrencei bolivianus* may be regarded as having selected *lawrencei*; if not,
this comment may be treated as selection of *E. lawrencei* as the name for the species by
those who regard it as distinct from *E. euleri*.

This historical review of the nomenclature of the group shows that Eisenmann (in
Meyer de Schauensee 1966) erred in several respects. The names *bolivianus* and *lawrencei*
appeared in separate papers by Allen in 1889. *Empidonax bolivianus* appeared in March, and
*E. lawrencei* was proposed in June. There is no problem of priority, and no first reviser is
needed. At any rate, Griscom and Greenway (1941) were the first to use the combination
*Empidonax lawrencei bolivianus* rather than Pinto (1944). Lawrence’s Flycatcher should
bear the specific name *bolivianus* if the species is placed in the genus *Empidonax* and kept
separate from *euleri*.

Zink and Johnson (1984) showed on the basis of an electrophoretic study that the
species *euleri* should be removed from the genus *Empidonax*. This was supported by syringeal
and additional biochemical evidence by Lanyon and Lanyon (1986), who established the
genus *Lathrotriccus* with the type species *Empidochanes euleri* Cabanis. The Lanyons did
“not address the considerable problems of intraspecific relationships within *euleri* (see Meyer
de Schauensee 1966 [actually Eisenmann as quoted above]).” The “*lawrencei*” complex
was apparently included in the concept of *Lathrotriccus euleri*.

The A.O.U. (1987) accepted the genus *Lathrotriccus* for the species *euleri*, which
is in the list of North American birds by virtue of the occurrence on Grenada of the form
*johnstonei* (see Traylor 1979). The A.O.U. (1983) included a note under its listing of
*Empidonax euleri* that “the northern forms, including that on Grenada, are sometimes rec-
ognized as a distinct species, *E. lawrencei* Allen, 1889 [Lawrence’s Flycatcher].” With the
recognition of *Lathrotriccus*, the A.O.U. (1987) wrote that there should be a change in the
note from “*E. lawrencei* Allen” to “*L. lawrencei* (Allen).”

However, Lawrence’s Flycatcher bears the name *lawrencei* because it was in the
genus *Empidonax*, where its original name *flaviventris* was preoccupied by *Empidonax
flaviventris* (Baird and Baird, 1843). When moved to *Lathrotriccus*, *flaviventris* is not pre-
occupied and becomes the correct specific name for Lawrence’s Flycatcher if it is recog-
nized as a species distinct from *L. euleri*. Moreover, the earliest name in the group is
*Blacicus flaviventris*, based on a bird from Grenada, where the species is perhaps only a
vagrant or extinct (Bond 1978). Assuming that the three records from Grenada (Bond 1956)
are vagrants from Trinidad, they must be of the same subspecies as the Trinidad population.
Thus, *Octhoeca flaviventris* Lawrence, 1887, *Empidonax lawrencei* Allen, 1889, and
*Empidonax johnstonei* Barbour, 1911 are all objective junior synonyms of *Lathrotriccus
flaviventris* (Lawrence, 1886 = [February] 1887), type locality Hampden, St. Andrews, 
Grenada. *Empidonax bolivianus* Allen, 1889 would become *L. f. bolivianus* if treated as a
distinct subspecies.

However, if Lawrence’s Flycatcher is maintained as a part of the species *L. euleri*,
it is necessary only to change the note in A.O.U. (1983, 1987) to read “*L. flaviventris
(Lawrence)*” rather than either “*E. lawrencei* Allen” or “*L. lawrencei* (Allen).”

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LITERATURE CITED


