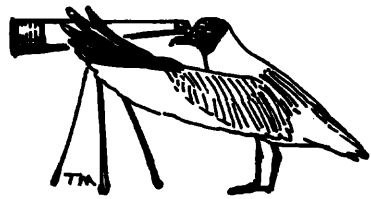


## IDENTIFICATION NOTES



The Identification Paper Committee continues to encourage the submission of brief notes on yet-to-be-resolved identification problems. The following note on the calls of two very similar *Empidonax* flycatchers is an example of such a note. It is not intended to be the final word, but will encourage, we hope, further investigation.

### CALLS OF ALDER AND WILLOW FLYCATCHERS

Until fairly recently, most observers did not attempt to separate Alder (*Empidonax alnorum*) and Willow (*E. traillii*) flycatchers in the field except by song and, indirectly, by breeding range and habitat (not safe in many areas). The idea that these two species, and most Empids in general, are readily identifiable only on the basis of song and breeding habitat has been instilled by many of the early breed of field guides. The result has been that many observers do not attempt identification of migrating *Empidonax* flycatchers. But many individuals in this group *call* during migration, as well as on the breeding and wintering grounds, and these calls are very useful in identifying many of them to species. Many silent Empids, if followed long enough, will give a call note (or rarely, in a few species such as Willow, a song) at some point!

The typical call notes of Alder and Willow flycatchers are distinctly different, and probably provide, in addition to song, the best means of identifying the two in the field. Willow's typical call is a liquid "whit," softer in tone than the more emphatic, sharp "whit" of the typical Least Flycatcher (*E. minimus*). Willow Flycatchers are frequently heard calling in migration. The typical call of the Alder Flycatcher is a sharp note, variously transcribed "pip," "peek," or "bic." The quality of this call is quite different from that of a Willow, and has been likened to the call of Hammond's Flycatcher (*E. hammondii*), Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*), or, vaguely, Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*). Certain other, less commonly heard calls of Alder and Willow flycatchers may also be useful for identification; here is a fruitful area for further study.

Although most observers will be understandably reluctant to report extralimital sightings of either species solely on the basis of calls, awareness of these differences can allow observers to focus their attention on the odd-sounding individuals. Increased attention to identification of these two species on migration would certainly go a long way towards a better understanding of their relative status in different parts of the continent.

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### PLUMAGE WEAR IN VIREO BELLII

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In this note I respond to and expand on some of the ideas presented by Stallcup (1984) in his "identification quiz" on Bell's Vireo. The bird depicted in the quiz was photographed at San Blas, Nayarit, in December 1975. The published black-and-white print is a reproduction of an original color slide, which Bruce Webb and Tim Manolis kindly loaned me. The written description in the quiz, however, is of a bird captured in San Diego County, California, as Stallcup (pers. comm.) has pointed out. Stallcup's description, "in life, this bird was white below and gray above with scarcely a