

From: photoeditor@azfo.net

Subject: ABC Report of Least Flycatcher observed on 22\_October\_2018 by Charles (Chuck) LaRue

Date: October 23, 2018 at 8:46 PM

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## Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*)

**Date observed:** 22 October 2018

**Initial observer(s):** Chuck LaRue

**Exact location:** Upper Pasture Canyon near Tuba City UTM NAD83 482026E 4003315N

**County:** Coconino

**City:** Tuba City

**Elevation:** 5065 FT

**Submitted by:** Charles (Chuck) LaRue.

**Number observed:** 1

**Age:** juvenile(?)

**Sex:** unknown

**Time observed:** 1000

**Duration of observation:** 30 minutes

**Minimum distance from bird:** as close as 10 feet

**Optics used:** 10X binoculars

**Position of sun:** Bird in full sun and in shade from all angles

**Habitat:** Riparian canyon bottom and slopes: Siberian elms, Russian olives, cottonwoods, hackberry, Virginia creeper and sumac. Open ground was interspersed both in the canyon bottom and on the aeolian falling dunes on the west side. A ca 60 foot sheer cliff of Navajo sandstone borders the east side the canyon which at this point is about 90 meters wide. Two small clear spring fed streams converge in the area the bird was seen. A fallow agricultural field borders the southern edge of the area the bird was utilizing.

**Others who observed this bird:** see below: Jason Wilder

**Anyone known to disagree:** No

**Was the bird identified before consulting any guides:** yes

**Identification guides used:** None.

**Were notes taken before or after the observation:** After

**How well was the bird seen:** Very Well

### Detailed description:

A small, brownish whit-calling up-tail-flicking, eye-ringed Empidonax. Top of head and back brownish/grayish and not overly olive (I don't see greens well). Below, the bird was rather pale/whitish with a weak wash of yellowish on the belly. Throat was near white contrasting with the rest of the head. It had a rather bold complete white eye ring that was very slightly thicker behind the eye. The wings were very dark/near black with two bold white wing bars and bold white tertial and secondary edging. Primary projection to my eye was medium length, certainly not long nor short. The bill was short and of medium to wide in width with the lower mandible obviously mostly pale being a pale yellowish. The bill in side profile was quite deep at the base that suggested a vireo's bill. Plumage was fresh and bright. Structurally the bird struck me as large headed and short tailed. It struck me overall as a richly-colored, crisply/boldly marked (a result of the brown tones dorsally, the contrasting white throat and belly and the black wing panels?) non-olive-colored Empidonax. In summary the most salient traits to me for identifying this bird were the liquid "pwit" call note, the short deep and medium width bill with pale lower mandible, rather bold contrasting whitish throat, the black wings with bold white wing bars, and the rather bold complete white eye ring that was only slightly thicker at the back of the eye. Everything about this bird was consistent with or at least suggested Least: vocalizations (type, quality and rate), structure/proportions, aspects of coloration, behavior, habitat and foraging location and date of occurrence. Regarding the date, see *The Birds of Arizona* (1964), pages 87-88: THREE (!) collected on October 20, 1951 on the Big Sandy River.

### Vocalizations:

This bird actively called, at times nearly incessantly. Call was an Empidonax "whit" but had a distinctly liquid quality to my ear: more of a "pwit". It was very suggestive of an "Audubon's Warbler."

### Behavior:

Perching and foraging and frequently calling in the larger perennial woody vegetation. It had a tendency to stay within the interior space of the trees. It spent most of its time within two meters of the ground. It frequently flicked its tail upward and flicked its wings.

### What similar species were considered and why were they eliminated:

Based on color, calls, behavior and structure, the potential ID options were immediately reduced to Dusky and Least Flycatcher. I first heard the bird calling and immediately was pretty certain it was a Least Flycatcher. During my initial observation a few moments later I noted the short deep bill in side profile and was certain it was a Least although I was having a bit of trouble convincing myself that it was indeed that species given its rarity in the state. I then set about looking for other characters. When the bird was overhead and I could see the pale lower

mandible and the medium to wide bill, and the obvious white throat. Structurally the bird lacked the lanky and long thin billed and long tailed proportions of a Dusky Flycatcher. The whole head/face structure of it did not say Dusky to me. At this point I was certain it was a Least and left it to continue up canyon to finish birding the canyon and to notify Jason Wilder of it who I knew needed the bird for his county list and who was languishing in some dreadful meeting back in Flagstaff. On my return the bird could be heard calling incessantly and loudly from a remarkable distance, perhaps as far as 90 meters or more. After relocating it I noted the near-black wing panels and bold white wingbars and tertial and secondary edges. I obtained some cell phone audio at this time. The next day (October 23) Jason Wilder and I returned to relocate the bird in an effort to obtain digital photographs and recordings of the call notes. We initially heard the bird on our approach to where I had seen it the previous day and after some time we were able to locate it visually and obtain good views and photos (by Wilder) and recordings (by Wilder). We spent about 30 minutes in these efforts.

**Experience with species:**

I became pretty familiar with the vocalizations and structure of this species in West Virginia in 2013 and 2014 where I observed dozens of individuals and noted a distinct resemblance of its call notes to western Yellow-rumped Warblers...the notes being distinctly different from the whit notes of Dusky and Gray flycatchers. I again saw and heard several in Wisconsin in June of this year (2018). It was during the course of these observations that I began to notice the depth of the bills in profile (which is perhaps emphasized by the overall short length) which imparts an aspect that is, to my eye, different from Dusky/Gray/Hammond's flycatchers.

**Experience with similar species:**

Extensively familiar with Dusky, Gray, Hammond's Flycatchers (as well others in the genus such as with "Traill's", "Western", Acadian, and Buff-breasted Flycatchers. I'm not too familiar with Yellow-bellied.

**Was the bird photographed: yes**

**Submitter name:** Charles (Chuck) LaRue

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**Date and time submitted:** 10/23/2018 11:46:49 PM

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[http://www.azfo.org/ArizonaBirdReview/SubmittedHtml/LEFL\\_Tuba\\_City\\_LaRue\\_22\\_October\\_2018\\_636759352096407707.html](http://www.azfo.org/ArizonaBirdReview/SubmittedHtml/LEFL_Tuba_City_LaRue_22_October_2018_636759352096407707.html)