

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABPAE33141

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Empidonax fulvifrons pygmaeus*

**COMMON NAME:** Northern Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Fulvous Flycatcher (for species)

**SYNONYMS:**

**FAMILY:** Tyrannidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** E. Coues, Ibis, n. s. (ser. 2), 1, no. 4, Oct 1865, p. 537. *Empidonax fulvifrons* J.P. Giraud, Jr., Annals of the New York Lyceum of Natural History, 1841.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** United States, Arizona, Yavapai Co., Fort Whipple (=Prescott).

**TYPE SPECIMEN:** E. Coues 1422 and 1423, 9 May 1865, Cotypes USNM 40601 (adult male skin) and USNM 40602 (adult female skin).

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** The species *fulvifrons* is 1 of 11+ (11-17) species in genus *Empidonax* (ABA reports 11 species, AOU 15, and ITIS reports 17 species), while the subspecies *pygmaeus* is 1 of 2 in the species *E. fulvifrons*.

**DESCRIPTION:** Smallest *Empidonax* flycatcher at 4-5 in. (10.2-12.7 cm) with a wingspan of 7.5 in. (19 cm). They are brownish above, with a breast cinnamon buff (orangey-buff during first winter), which is paler on worn summer birds. The eye ring is whitish, the wing bars are pale, and the lower mandible of the small bill is entirely pale orange. The iris is deep chestnut-brown and the legs and feet are black.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Its' orange-buffy breast, small size and bold eye ring separate it from other species.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Color drawing (Scott 1987:293)

Color drawing of species (Sibley 2000)

Color drawing of species (Robbins 1983)

Color drawing of species (National Geographic 1987)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Breeds from southeastern Arizona (Natanes Plateau, Huachuca Mountains, Chiricahua Mountains) and central western New Mexico to southwestern Chihuahua. Formerly found breeding in central Arizona, in the Prescott area. Winters from southeastern

Sonora and western Durango south to Nayarit, possibly to Mexico and Morelos. (AOU 1957). The species is known to range as far south as Guatemala and Honduras.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Summer resident in southeastern Arizona, breeding only in Huachuca, Santa Catalina and Chiricahua mountains (Glinski 1988).

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Unlike most species in this group, the Buff-breasted Flycatcher molts before it leaves for the south in the fall, which means that its elegant new cinnamon plumage could be seen around the last of August. Their call note is a soft *pwit*, and their typical song is a quick *chicky-whew* or *chee-lick* (Scott 1987).

**REPRODUCTION:** “Nest in small colonies in dry coniferous or mixed woodlands of canyon floors” (Scott 1987). Parasitism by cowbirds believed to occur, however, nesting under overhangs may physically prevent a nest parasite from reaching the flycatcher nest. (It should be noted that this shelter helps maintain birds within energetic limits, Bowers 1984). They nest on a horizontal limb near the trunk or the crotch of a tree. The nest is a neat, compact and deep cup made of plant fibers, grass, leaves, rootlets, blossoms, lined with plant down, grass, hair and feathers, which is built by the female over 5-7 days. The breeding season begins mid-April and usually ends by early August. They are single brooded but will regularly replace a lost nest. There are usually 3-4 eggs that are sub elliptical, smooth, non-glossy, creamy white, unmarked and 0.6 in. The female incubates the eggs for 15-17 days. Male brings food to the nest, but the female feeds young. The nestlings are altricial, with the first flight between 13-17 days. The young may huddle together on a branch for several days after fledging. Nestlings leave nest although they are parental dependent for another 4 weeks (Glinski 1988).

**FOOD HABITS:** Insects and invertebrates (Glinski 1988). They fly out from their perch and catch insects in the air or under leaves. Also forages in bushes and under trees.

**HABITAT:** Open stands of pine (especially ponderosa and Chihuahua) or sycamore with bare, weedy, or grassy under story areas (Glinski 1988); riparian vegetation, does not tolerate dense vegetation.

**ELEVATION:** Elevation ranges between 5,720 - 8,625 feet (1,743-2,629 m) based on AGFD HDMS unpublished records (accessed 2003).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Transition and Upper Sonoran life zones.

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Declining in past, however, at present (1995), appears to be stable (T. Corman 1995).

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** SC (USDI, FWS 1996)  
[C2 USDI, FWS 1994]

**STATE STATUS:** 2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)  
[1B (AGFD SWAP 2012)]  
[WSC (AGFD, WSCA 1996 in prep)]  
[Endangered (AGFD, TNW 1988)]

**OTHER STATUS:** Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region  
3 2007, 2013)  
[None (USDA, FS Region 3 1999)]  
[Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS  
Region 3 1988)]

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Fire may be an important management tool. As this bird is believed to require open habitat, fires could open habitat and improve conditions for the species. Loss of habitat is major threat.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** Protected at the species level by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Survey and monitor populations. Detailed information on life history needed. This lack of information precludes designing management actions that might improve habitat. Also need to determine role of fire suppression in decreasing forest under story, which decreases amount of suitable habitat.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** DOD - Fort Huachuca Military Reservation, USFS - Coronado National Forest, NPS - Saguaro National Park.

**SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION****REFERENCES:**

- American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). 1957. Check-list of North American Birds. Fifth Edition. AOU, Port City Press, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. p. 347.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1988. Threatened Native Wildlife in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department Publication. Phoenix, Arizona. p. 16.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1996 in prep. Wildlife of special concern in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department Publication. Phoenix, Arizona. p. 16.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 2012. Arizona's State Wildlife Action Plan 2012-2022. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona. 233 pages.

- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 2022. Arizona Wildlife Conservation Strategy: 2022-2032. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona. 378 pages.
- Baichich, P.J. & C.J.O. Harrison. 1997. A guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American Birds. Second Edition. Academic Press, San Diego, California. pp. 215.
- Bowers, R.K. 1984. Nest parasitism by cowbirds on buff-breasted flycatchers, with comments on nest-site selection. *Wilson Bulletin* 96(4):718-719.
- Bowers, R.K., Jr., and J.B. Dunning, Jr. 1994. Buff-breasted Flycatcher (*Empidonax fulvifrons*). In: A. Poole and F. Gill, editors. *The Birds of North America*, No. 125. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Corman, T. 1995. Pers comm to D. Ide (AGFD, HDMS) May 25, 1995.
- Ehrlich, P.R. et al. 1985. *The birders handbook*. Simon and Schuster Inc. New York, New York. p. 392.
- Glinski, R.L. 1988. Nongame field note: buff-breasted flycatcher. *Wildlife Views*, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona.
- Monson, G. and A.R. Phillips. 1981. Annotated checklist of birds of Arizona. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona. pp. 102-103.
- National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field guide to the birds of North America*. National Geographic Society, pp. 292-293.
- NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. 2002. Version 1.6. Arlington, Virginia, USA: NatureServe. Available: <https://explorer.natureserve.org/> (Accessed: May 14, 2003).
- Phillips, A., J. Marshall, and G. Monson. 1964. *Birds of Arizona*. The University of Arizona Press. Tucson, Arizona. p.86.
- Robbins, C.S. 1983. *A guide to field identification of birds of North America*. Golden Press, New York, New York. pp. 214-215.
- Sibley, D. 2000. *The Sibley guide to birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, New York. Pp: 329.
- Terres, J.K. 1980. *The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, New York. p. 383.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 1988. Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 1999. Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 2007. Regional Forester's List of Sensitive Animals.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 2013. Regional Forester's List of Sensitive Animals.
- USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Notice of 90-day finding on petition to list the Buff-breasted Flycatcher. *Federal Register* 58(70):19402-19403.
- USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service. 1994. Endangered and threatened wildlife and plants; animal candidate review for listing as endangered or threatened species; proposed rule. *Federal Register* 59(219):58985.
- USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Endangered and threatened wildlife and plants; review of plant and animal taxa that are candidates for listing as endangered or threatened species. *Federal Register* 61(40):7596-7613.

**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:**

Troy Corman, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Revised:** 1995-05-25 (DBI)  
1997-03-05 (SMS)  
2003-05-31 (AMS)  
2013-11-14 (BDT)  
2022-12-27 (MBL)

To the user of this abstract: you may use the entire abstract or any part of it. We do request, however, that if you make use of this abstract in plans, reports, publications, etc. that you credit the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Please use the following citation:

Arizona Game and Fish Department. 20XX (= **year of last revision as indicated at end of abstract**). X...X (= **taxon of animal or plant**). Unpublished abstract compiled and edited by the Heritage Data Management System, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, AZ. X pp.