

(Chris Talkington)



Tyrannidae the FLYCATCHERS

These are the “Tyrant” Flycatchers, so named because of their aggressiveness at defending their breeding territories. They are solitary birds and are usually found perched on the end of a branch of a tree. When feeding, flycatchers dart out from their perch to grab insects and then often return to the same spot. Twelve different kinds of flycatchers are regularly found in the Carolina Piedmont. Eleven of these are described below. One, the Eastern Phoebe, is a year-round resident. Four others are regular summer breeding residents, and one, the Willow Flycatcher, occasionally breeds here. The remaining five species are transients that are found here during spring or fall migration. One other member of this family, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, is described in detail in the Supplementary Bird List.

Five of these 11 flycatchers are quite similar in appearance and are classified in the genus *Empidonax*. Unfortunately, *Empidonax* flycatchers “are among the most intimidating of identification problems for birders in North America.” In fact, they can be so difficult to identify by sight that ornithologists have developed a special method called the “Ratio Approach” for helping to separate them. This method uses comparisons of bill length and width, wing length, tail length, posture, behavior, habitat, and more to distinguish each “empid.” Thankfully, most of these birds are more easily recognized by their song or call. Unfortunately, most do not sing during fall migration, thus making them notoriously difficult to identify in that season. Oftentimes, the end result is that many of these birds end up being recorded as simply an *Empidonax* sp.

*Note: As this book went to press, a new flycatcher was discovered in the Central Carolina region. Ken Kneidel photographed an Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) at Randolph Middle School in Charlotte on November 18, 2017. If the North Carolina Bird Records Committee confirms the identity of this bird, it will be the 349th species documented in this region. This flycatcher has also been reported twice in Wake County and once in Winston-Salem; nowhere else in the Piedmont of the Carolinas.*