

## FIRST NESTING RECORD OF A WILLOW FLYCATCHER IN MISSISSIPPI

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The Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) is a common summer resident across the north and central United States, and records of successful nests have been recorded from southeast Arkansas and west Tennessee. On 21 July 1996, my wife, Shannon, and I found a single Willow Flycatcher catching insects from a power line running parallel to a gravel access road to the North Unit of the Tallahatchie National Wildlife Refuge. The nest was located just inside Tallahatchie County, about five miles south of Crowder, Mississippi (34 degrees 06' N, 90 degrees 08' W). The refuge runs alongside the Panola-Quitman Floodway only three miles west of the Loess Bluffs of the Mississippi River Delta and forty-five miles east of the Mississippi River. When the sighting took place, it was 6:45 p.m. and all we saw was a single bird with a mouthful of insects go in and out of an approximately 15-foot tall willow (*Salix niger*) sapling.

After ten minutes of viewing, we realized the bird still had the same mouthful of insects and acted like it wanted to go to a small nest we had spotted. Later examination revealed the nest to be about eight feet off the ground in a black willow. It was attached to an American buckwheat vine (*Brunnichia olata*) in two places. The nest was constructed of grass stems and other plant fibers and lined with finer grasses and plant materials. The bird looked like a Willow Flycatcher, lacking a conspicuous eye ring and having a brownish-green back, but we had still not heard the distinct "whit" call note needed to confirm the species. We decided to move away fifty feet or so, and immediately the flycatcher went to the nest and appeared to feed nestlings, although we could not see them.

On 27 July, I returned with Prentiss Hooper and was joined by Marvin Davis in the early morning hours to listen for the "whit" call note of the species. For an hour we listened to the pair of Willow Flycatchers as they collected insects and fed their brood, calling "whit" every few seconds. Viewing through a Kowa-TSN2 spotting scope with a 30x lens, we saw a week-old Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) and another nestling that was obviously smaller. The flycatcher nestling surely seemed doomed, as the cowbird young scrapped for and devoured everything we watched the adults bring.

On 29 July, Fred Broerman photographed an adult feeding the fledgling cowbird in the willow. He saw no evidence of another fledgling.

At 1:25 p.m., on 10 August, I was looking for the flycatchers at the nest site, when I heard an unfamiliar call note coming from about 200-300 feet south of the nest in the same stand of willows. Shortly after seeking the source of the call note, I watched an adult Willow Flycatcher fly into one of the willows. As I was looking for the bird that had entered the willow, I found a juvenile flycatcher with buffy wingbars and buffy feather edgings, with mouth open, making the begging call note I had been drawn to. An adult Willow Flycatcher arrived and fed the fledgling several times. All of a sudden the fledgling cowbird fought its way between the flycatchers, then all of the birds flew into the field adjacent to the willows.

The habitat of bushy, dense willow trees in conjunction with dry weedy areas and a water course close by is typical for the Willow Flycatcher.