

PRIMARY SONG BY A JUVENILE WILLOW FLYCATCHER

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Abstract.—The timing of song development in suboscines, in which song appears not to be learned from other adults is poorly known. The Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*) is a suboscine with a primary song typically referred to as *fitz-bew*. I report here an instance of very early singing by a 6–8-wk-old Willow Flycatcher, which sang in an aggressive context in response to a recording of adult flycatcher song. This is exceptionally early development of primary song, even among suboscines. Early song development may assist in the defense of winter territories.

CANTO PRIMARIO POR PARTE DE UN JUVENIL DE *EMPIDONAX TRAILLII*

Sinopsis.—Se conoce muy poco del periodo particular de tiempo durante el cual desarrollan el canto (no aprendido de adultos) los juveniles de aves. *Empidonax traillii* es un papamoscas cuya canción primaria puede describirse como un *fitz-biu*. En este trabajo se informa un caso en el cual un juvenil de entre 6–8 semanas de edad produjo el canto previamente descrito en respuesta a una grabación del canto de un adulto. Este es un caso excepcional de temprano desarrollo del canto primario en esta especie. El desarrollo del canto a tan temprana edad pudiera ayudar en la defenza del territorio invernal de esta especie.

As part of a population demography study, territorial Southwestern Willow Flycatchers (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) were captured and banded along the San Pedro River, approximately 16 km south of Winkelman, Pinal County, Arizona. On 12 Jul. 1996, the banding team was using a playback of the Willow Flycatcher's primary song (Stein 1963) to attract adult flycatchers into the mist net. At 0720 h, a Willow Flycatcher landed nearby and sang several soft *fitz-bews*. It then flew into the net, singing and giving distress calls as it was extracted and handled. After being banded and released, the bird flew to a nearby tree and sang *fitz-bew* several times while the flycatcher song tape was still being played. The context in which this bird sang can be interpreted as aggressive, in that it responded to and flew at a broadcast song of another individual.

During processing, the bird was identified as a juvenile, based on buffy wing bars, fresh feathers, and pointed rectrices (Pyle et al. 1987). All of the bird's feathers were unshathed, and the tail was full length. Tarsal length (15.5 mm) and bill width (5.2 mm) were slightly below the observed range for adults in this population. Based on these characteristics, the juvenile probably fledged 2–4 wk prior to capture, which would correspond to the estimated fledging date of a Willow Flycatcher nest from an adjacent territory (the nest in the territory where the juvenile was caught had fledged young only three days earlier).

A recognizable primary song by a young bird of this age is exceptionally early, even for a suboscine (Catchpole and Slater 1995). Among the North

American *Empidonax*, the Willow Flycatcher (this study) and Alder Flycatcher (*E. alnorum*; Kroodsma 1984) are reported to develop song shortly after fledging. The benefits of this early song development are unknown, but may include increased capability to defend resources during the juvenile's first winter. Both Willow and Alder Flycatchers sing on the wintering grounds (Gorski 1969, 1971), and such singing may indicate winter territory defense (Catchpole and Slater 1995, Rappole 1995). However, further observations and research are needed to determine whether juvenile singing is a regular occurrence among the *Empidonax* flycatchers and if it truly has a role in winter territorial defense.

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