CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHERS NESTING WITHIN A CAVE

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Reported nest sites of the Western Flycatcher complex [formerly Empidonax difficilis (AOU 1989, Johnson 1980)] are primarily in trees or other vegetation but also include stream banks, cracks and ledges of rock cliffs, and structures such as buildings and bridges (Bendire 1895, Bent 1942, Davis et al. 1963). On 26 July 1993 we observed Cordilleran Flycatchers (E. occidentalis) nesting within a cave in the San Mateo Mountains (T5S, R7W, NW 1/4 Sec. 27), Socorro Co., New Mexico. The cave was situated in a rock face on the south facing slope of Bear Trap Canyon. Vegetation on the south-facing slope was primarily Gambel's oak (Quercus gambelii) with a few ponderosa pines (Pinus ponderosa), while the north-facing slope was predominantly ponderosa pine with some aspen (Populus tremuloides) and Douglas fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii). A small intermittent stream flowed through the canyon. The cave entrance was approximately 3 m high and narrowed for a distance of approximately 8 m before constricting to approximately 1.5 m high and 0.5 m wide for another 3 m. Although we investigated the cave during a sunny afternoon, light within the cave progressively dimmed requiring the use of a flashlight for observations away from the cave entrance.

Upon our entering the cave, a bird flew past us, struck the floor of the cave, recovered flight, and exited. We found three approximately 5-day old nestlings in a nest located on a narrow ledge. The ledge was approximately 1.4 m high near the roof of the cave just in front of the cavern's constriction (approximately 8 m within the cave). A Cordilleran Flycatcher was observed calling from an oak at the entrance of the cave. We observed the cave for approximately 1.5 hours during which time this individual remained near the cave entrance calling. It occasionally flew off, returned to an oak near the entrance with an insect, and flew into the cave at least 20 times. At times, another Cordilleran Flycatcher joined the first in the oaks at the cave entrance. The second bird was not observed to carry food or enter the cave.

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LITERATURE CITED


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