

EMPIDONAX
THE “*GNAT MASTER*”

WESTERN EMPIDS
PLUMAGE

***“YOU COULD DO WORSE THAN TO SPEND YOUR
DAYS STARING AT BLUE JAYS.”***

JULIE ZICKEFOOSE, SAVING JEMIMA: LIFE AND LOVE WITH A HARD-LUCK JAY

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LGBs (LITTLE GRAY BIRDS)

PLUMAGE OVERVIEW

- ▶ Plumage
 - ▶ Subtle
 - ▶ **Highly variable**
 - ▶ Changes with wear
 - ▶ Molt schedule
 - ▶ Affected by lighting

- ▶ All Empids:
 - ▶ Drab overall
 - ▶ Darker wings
 - ▶ Pale wing-bars
 - ▶ Eye-rings
 - ▶ Breast Bands – variable
 - ▶ Upper Parts – varying tones of olive, brown, or gray
 - ▶ Lower Parts – yellowish, grayish, to whitish

TRY, TRY, TRY TO
RESIST.....

.....making ID based on subtle coloration
differences shown in field guides!!!!

EYE RING

EYE-RING

a) Intensity

- i. Absent
- ii. Faint
- iii. Narrow
- iv. Complete
- v. Bold

b) Shape

- a) typically not quite even all the way around
 - i. Slightly thinner across top
 - ii. Slightly thinner in back
 - iii. “Kick” in back
 - iv. Broken
 - v. Messy

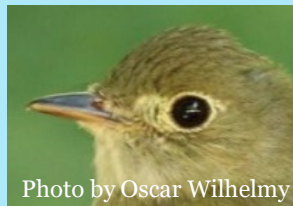
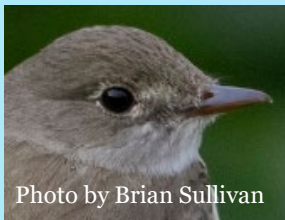
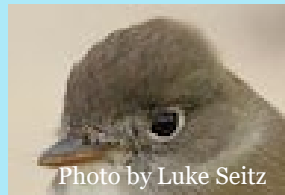
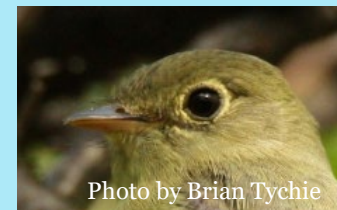
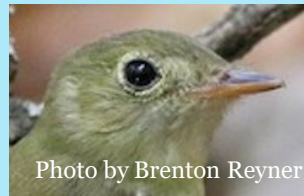
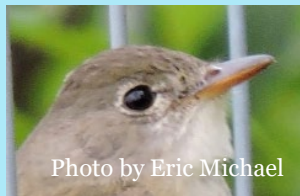
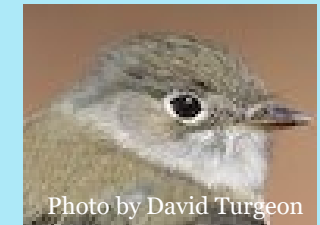
c) Contrast eye-ring vs face

EASTERN EMPIDS EYE-RING COMPARISON

INCREASING VIBRANCY 

Willow/Alder

Conspicuous but narrow, to absent.



Gray



Photo by Lindsay Story

Inconspicuous
but complete.
Some show
“spectacles”.

EYE-RING



Photo by Ryan O'Donnell

Dusky



Photo by Stratton Hatfield

EYE-RING



Photo by W. Douglas Robinson

White & well-developed, but not always conspicuous.
May be broken or show “spectacles”.

Hammond's

EYE-RING



Photo by Jerry McPetridge

Usually **conspicuous**, complete, well-defined & frequently **thicker behind eye**.



Photo by Antonio Robles

“Western”

EYE-RING



Photo by Grace Oliver

Conspicuous, and usually narrowed at top & broadened behind eye – often to a point.



Photo by Knut Hansen

EYE-RING COMPARISON

INCREASING CONSPICUOUS-NESS 

Gray

Inconspicuous but complete. Some show “spectacles”.



Photo by Doug Hitchcox



Photo by Van Remson

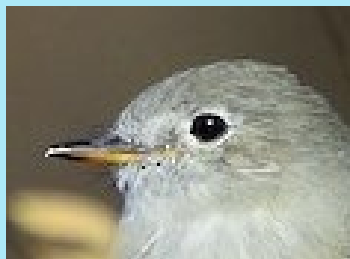


Photo by Ad Konigs

Dusky

White & well-developed, but **not always conspicuous**. May be broken or show “spectacles”.



Photo by Mathew Grube



Photo by Paul Suchenak

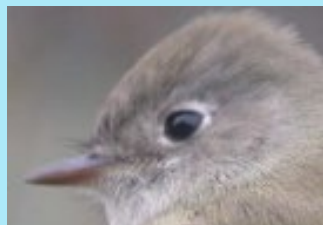


Photo by Marshall Iliff

Hammond's

Usually **conspicuous**, complete, well-defined, **thicker behind eye & thinner on top**.



Photo by Ernest Crvich

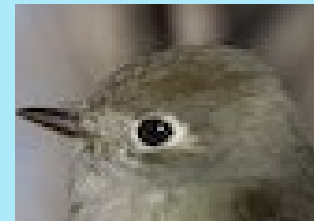


Photo by Chris Benesh

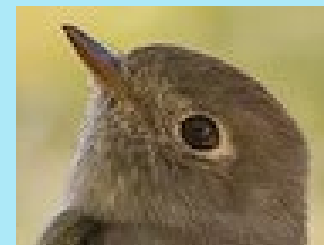


Photo by Lyndie Mason Warner

“Western”

Conspicuous, and usually narrowed at top & usually **broadened behind eye**, often to a point.



Photo by Petra Ckaton

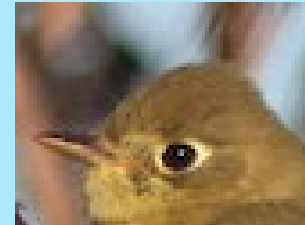


Photo by Larry Thierren

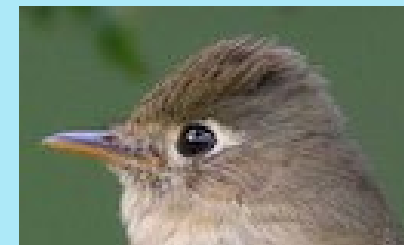


Photo by Linda Laing

EYE-RING SUMMARY

INCREASING CONSPICUOUS-NESS



Gray

Usually a complete white eye-ring which tends to be somewhat inconspicuous owing to the lack of contrast with the pale gray face. Many individuals show the suggestion of a white spectacle formed by the eye-ring and a whitish supraloral stripe between the top of the eye and the forehead.

Dusky

Although white and well-developed, it is not always conspicuous, because the head is not very dark. May be broken on some individuals. May be conspicuous and lores may be pale--giving the bird a "spectacled" look -- but some individuals show indistinct eye-rings.

Hammond's

The white eye-ring is usually conspicuous, complete, well-defined, frequently thicker behind the eye & thinner on top.

"Western"

Conspicuous, white or yellowish-white and usually has a distinctive shape; narrowed or even broken across the top of the eye, broadened (often to a point) behind the eye, for a teardrop or almond shaped effect.

MOLT

CONDITION OF PLUMAGE



CONDITION OF PLUMAGE

- Molting
- Fresh
- Slightly worn
- Worn

MOLT

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Patchy wing-bars
- Rough, uneven eye-ring
- Uneven tail
- Primary projection uneven
(unreliable too)

WHAT DO “FRESH” & “WORN” LOOK LIKE?



Photo by Mark Scheel

Gray (April)



Photo by Jason Wilder

Gray
(August)

WHAT DOES “FRESH” AND “WORN” LOOK LIKE?

Hammonds (Feb)



Photo by Lee Wallace

Hammonds (August)



Photo by Anya Auerbach

WHAT DOES “FRESH” AND “WORN” LOOK LIKE?

Hammonds (Feb)



Photo by Lee Wallace

Hammonds (July)



Photo by Tom Johnson

WHAT DO “FRESH” & “WORN” LOOK LIKE?



Photo by Gord Gadsden

Dusky
(April)



Photo by Jim Merritt

Dusky
(August)

WHAT DO “FRESH” & “WORN” LOOK LIKE?



Photo by Liam Singh

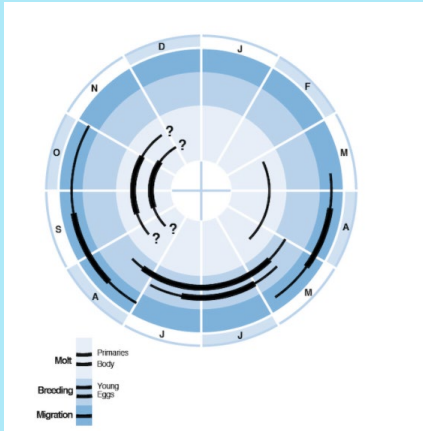
“Western”
(April)



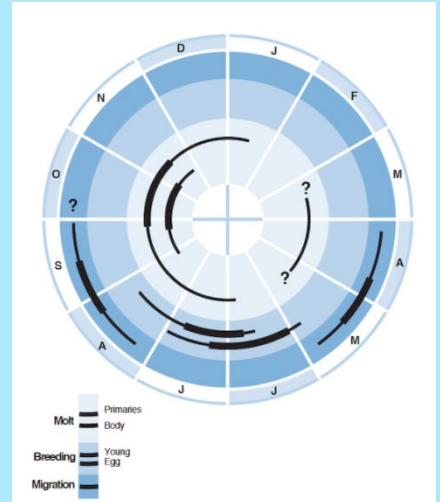
Photo by Jeff Bray

“Western”
(August)

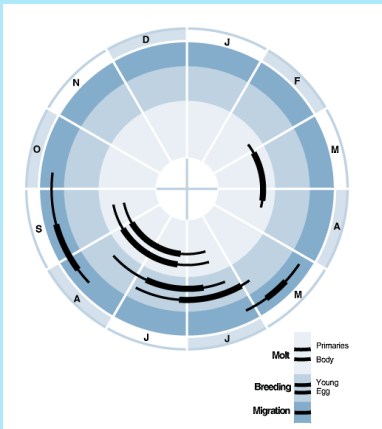
WESTERN EMPIDS LIFE CYCLES MOLT



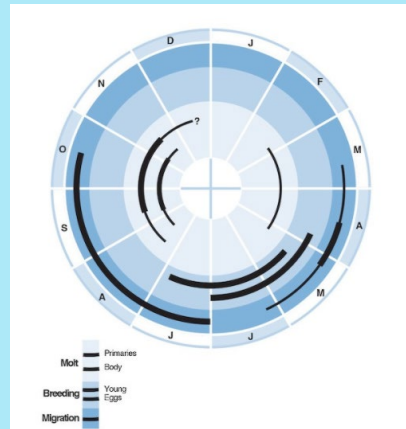
Gray



Dusky

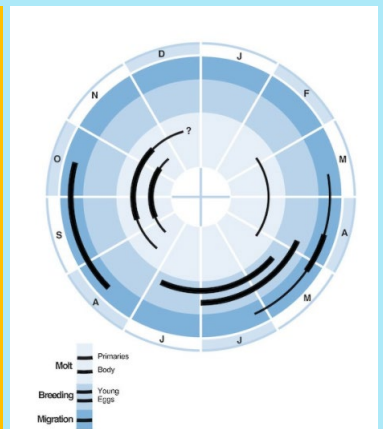


Hammond's

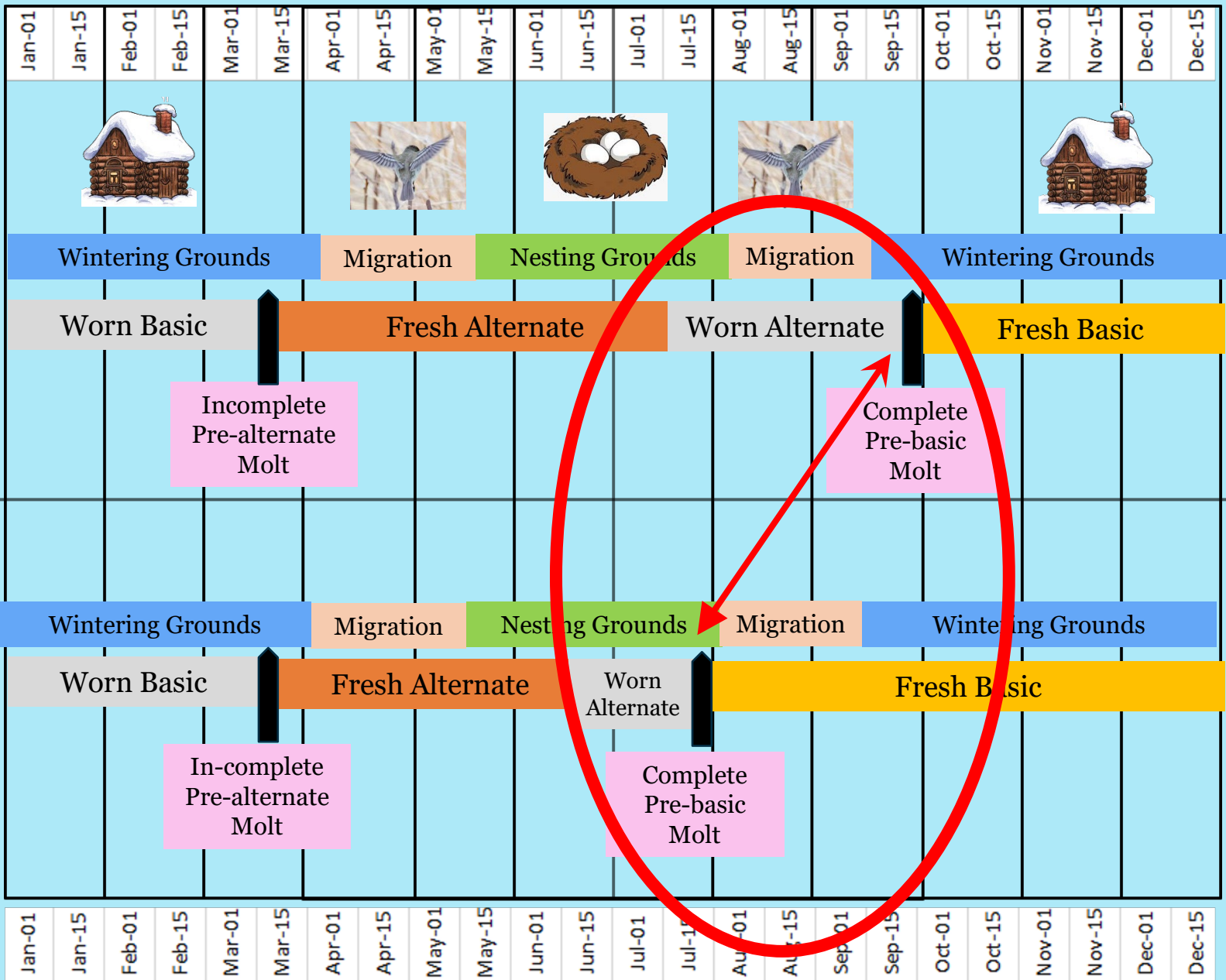


Pacific-slope

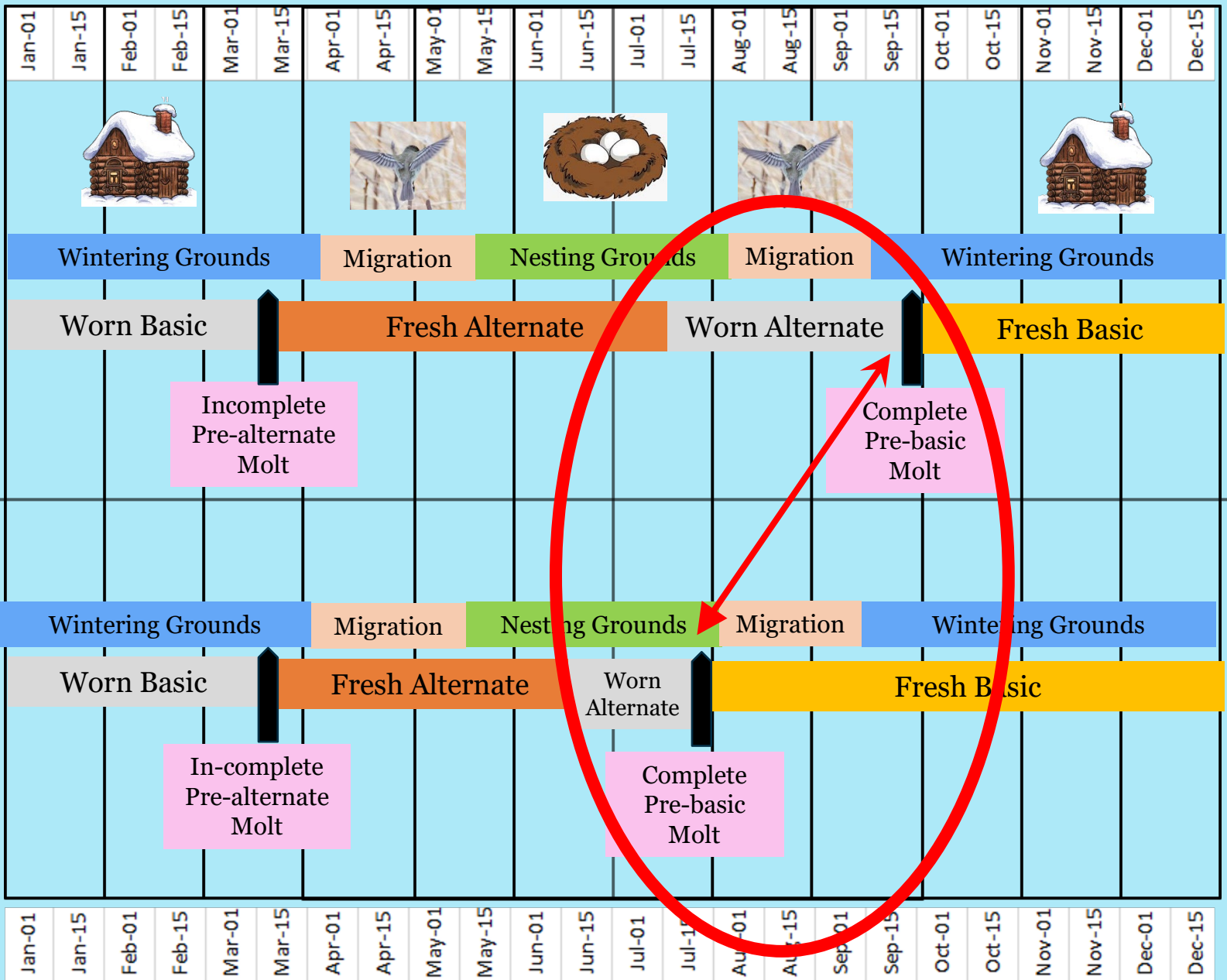
“Western”



Cordilleran



Eastern Empid Molt Strategy



Empid Molt Strategy

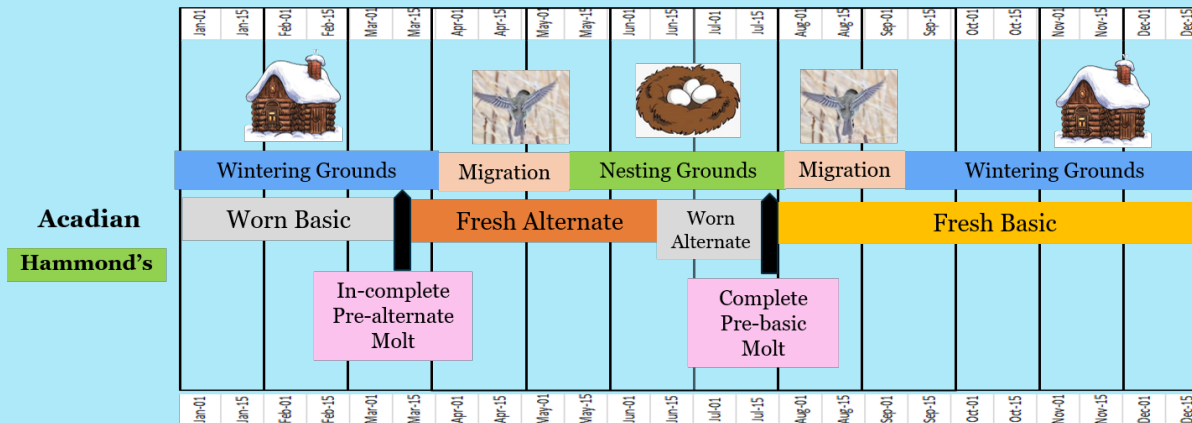
EMPID MOLT TAKE HOME

(TO BE STORED IN YOUR HEAD)

- ▶ Most species
 - ▶ Fresh in spring
 - ▶ Worn in late summer & early fall (August-October)

- ▶ Acadian & Hammond's
 - ▶ Fresh in spring
 - ▶ Fresh in late summer & early fall (August-October)

Empid Molt Strategy



HEAD & THROAT COLOR & CONTRAST WITH FACE

- ▶ Not as helpful as for Eastern Empids
- ▶ All are low contrast & lack sharp demarcation

EASTERN EMPIDS BY DAVID A. SIBLEY

Least



Yellow-bellied



Acadian



Willow



Alder



All Illustrations
by David A. Sibley
From *Sibley Birds*
app

WESTERN EMPIDS BY DAVID A. SIBLEY



Hammond's



Dusky



Gray

All Illustrations
by David A. Sibley
From *Sibley Birds* app



Buff-breasted



Cordilleran

"Western"



Pacific-slope

WESTERN EMPIDS BY HILLARY BURN



Hammond's



Dusky



Gray

Western



Buff-breasted

All illustrations by Hillary Burn
From *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*
Birds of the World website



Cordilleran



Pacific-slope

Gray

HEAD, THROAT & FACE COLOR & CONTRAST



Photo by Kalin Ocana

Very pale gray-- sometimes nearly white-- but there is no sharp separation of color between throat & sides of head.



Photo by Van Remson

Dusky

HEAD, THROAT & FACE COLOR & CONTRAST



Photo by Tim Avery

Throat is pale gray, but often looks whitish in bright light. Low contrast.



Photo by Darren Clarke

Hammond's

HEAD, THROAT & FACE COLOR & CONTRAST



Photo by Jacob Drucker

Gray-ish head & throat. No sharp contrast between the face & throat.



Photo by Darren Clarke

Western

HEAD, THROAT & FACE COLOR & CONTRAST



Photo by Brooke Miller

Low contrast throat. The only western Empid with yellow (dull pale yellow or grayish yellow) on the throat.



Photo by Del Nelson

HEAD, THROAT & FACE COMPARISON

All are low contrast & lack sharp demarcation

INCREASING DISTINCTION 

Gray

Very pale gray-- sometimes nearly white.



Doug Hitchcox

Dusky

Throat is pale gray, often looks whitish in bright light.



Mathew Grube

Hammond's

Gray-ish head & throat.



Ernest Crvich

"Western"

Only western Empid with dull, pale, or grayish yellow.



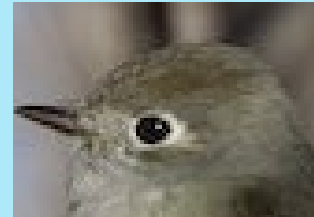
Petra Ckaton



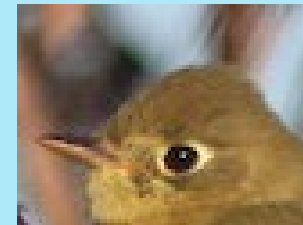
Van Remson



Paul Suchenak



Chris Benesh



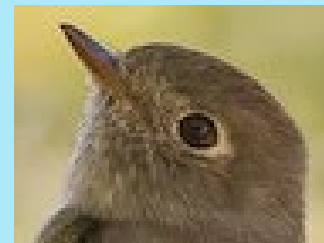
Larry Thierren



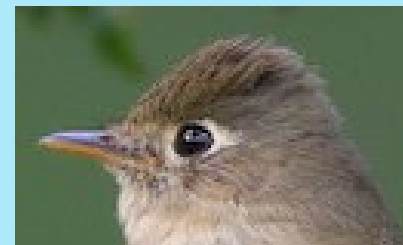
Ad Konigs



Marshall Iliff



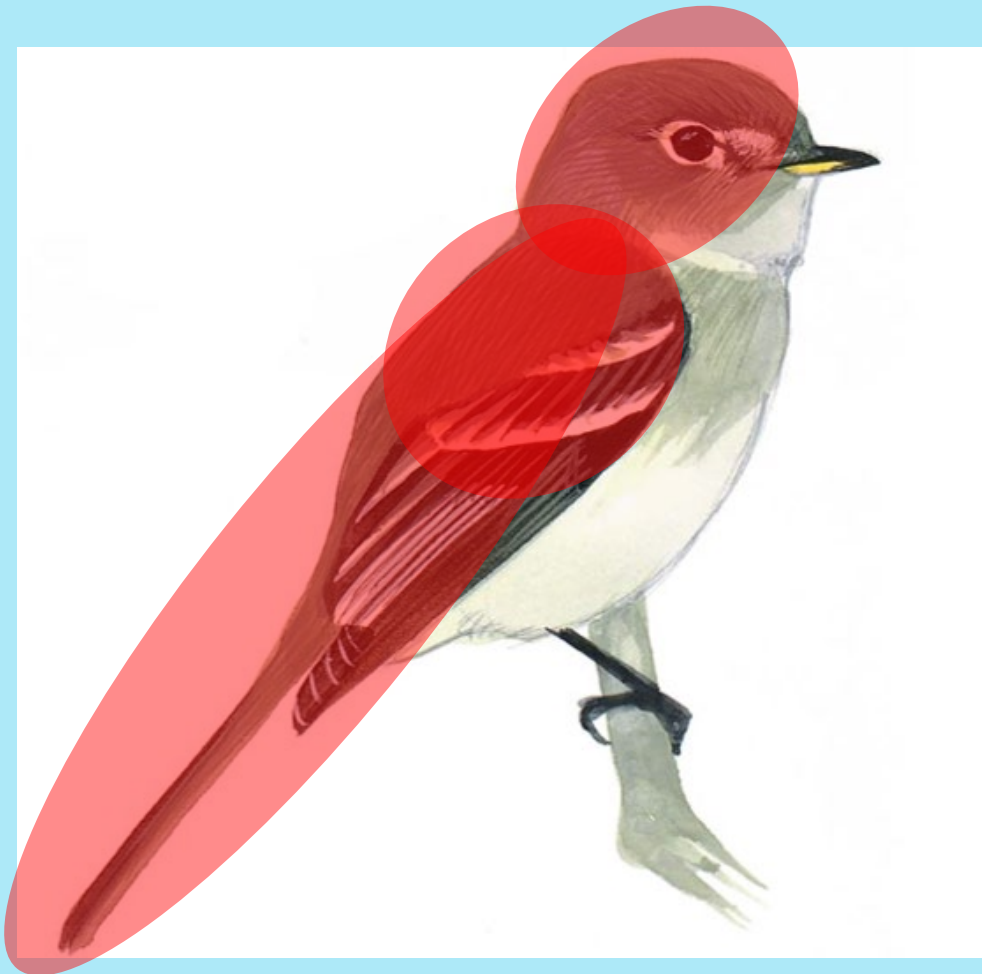
Lyndie Mason Warner



Linda Laing

UPPER PARTS

UPPER PARTS



UPPER PARTS

Gray

Upper body: Pale and gray in fresh plumage. Paler than any other Empid. Birds in fresh plumage are a bit darker, often with a slight olive tinge to the mantle.



Photo by Richard Trinker

Wing panel & Wing bars: Dusky gray wings have dull whitish wing-bars as well as tertial & secondary edges. Low wing-panel contrast.



Photo by Van Remson

UPPER PARTS

Hammond's



Photo by Adam Dudley

Wing panel & Wing bars: Dusky gray wings. Wing-bars & tertial edges buffy in fresh plumage; dull in spring and summer. Low wing panel contrast.

Upper body: Darker back contrasts with grayer head & face. Grayish olive when worn. Darker olive when fresh. The wings are dusky. Wing-bars, tertial edges, & secondary edges creamy-white.



Photo by David M. Bell

UPPER PARTS

Dusky



Photo by Jack Williamson

Upper body: Somewhat drab. Back washed with grayish-olive, but little contrast with gray head. Wings & tail are gray with a brownish cast. Low contrast edges on wing feathers (compare to Least). Pale area on lores often more pronounced than on other Empids.



Photo by Carol Riddell

Wing panel & Wing bars: Low wing panel contrast. Dusky wings with dull, narrow, moderately contrasting, whitish wing bars. Whitish edged tertials and secondaries..

UPPER PARTS

“Western”



Photo by Tammy McQuade

Wing panel & Wing bars: Dull whitish, without strong contrast. Less contrast and tertial edges than **Yellow-bellied**.

Upper body: Brownish-olive overall; brownest on rump. Browner overall with drabber wings than **Yellow-bellied**.

Virtually identical, but **Cordilleran** more color-saturated, **Pacific-slope** browner.



Photo by Dan Vickers

“WESTERN” VS YELLOW-BELLIED

May be difficult. All points are variable, subtle and hard to detect without direct comparison. Normal ranges barely overlap, but strays do occur.

- Duller green above & more buffy or brownish-yellow below.
- Less wing panel contrast.
- Eye-ring more tear-drop.

- Stronger green tones.
- Blacker, more contrasting wing panel.
- More even thickness eye-ring.



LOWER PARTS

LOWER PARTS



Gray



Photo by Gil Ewing

LOWER PARTS

Lower body: Breast pale to medium gray, with slight olive tinge. Faint yellowish or creamy-buff wash to the belly which may look white in the field.



Photo by Matt Davis

Hammond's

LOWER PARTS

Lower body: Whitish throat & slightly yellow-tinged belly are separated by pale gray vest. Breast is olive-gray or brownish-gray, usually dark, towards sides. Often a "vested" look.



Photo by Bez Bezuidenhout



Photo by David Leatherman

Dusky



Photo by Dan Murphy

Lower body: Mostly whitish or pale gray, but belly usually lightly tinged with yellow. Olive-gray wash across chest. Sometimes “vested”. Some all pale underparts.

LOWER PARTS



Photo by Robert Baker

“Western”

LOWER PARTS



Photo by Steve Stump

Lower body: Yellowish on the throat & from the belly up to the center of the chest. Vague, olive or brownish-olive breast band & wash on sides.

Worn birds (in summer) may show almost no yellow tones below.



Photo by Joann Potter Riggle

WESTERN EMPIDS BY DAVID A. SIBLEY



Hammond's



Dusky



Gray

All Illustrations
by David A. Sibley
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Buff-breasted



Cordilleran

"Western"



Pacific-slope

Hammond's



Photo by Terry Gray

Dusky



Photo by Steve Rottenborn

Gray



Photo Mark Sheel

WESTERN EMPIDS



Photo by Oliver Komar

Buff-breasted



Photo by Jason Vasallo

"Western"