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Identifying this "different bird" relied in part to the process of elimination.

A "DIFFERENT" BIRD

"Quick! Bring your binoculars. There's a different flycatcher of some sort, hawking insects from a tree down in the tree line. I'll try to get a photo of it from the house." From the way it was flying out to catch insects, and then returning to the same spot in the same tree, we knew it was not one of our regular resident flycatchers. Here is a photo of the tree on the left where the bird was working from as seen from our front door, albeit, later in the day.

And here is a slightly enlarged view of the bird from the same spot.



Our most common resident flycatcher is the Eastern Phoebe, which nests on the property and is present daily, often perching and pumping its tail quite close to the house (*below*). The bird in the tree line was definitely not an Eastern Phoebe. Another flycatcher that nests on our property, but down by the pond, not up near the house, is the Willow Flycatcher. (*below, left*) The Willow Flycatcher is reclusive, mostly secretive, and generally hard to find after it has stopped singing in the spring when it is establishing its territory. The bird in the tree line was definitely not a Willow Flycatcher.



The only other flycatcher that occurs regularly on our property is the Great Crested Flycatcher (*below, right*), but they are much larger, and do not generally hunt by hawking insects as the smaller flycatchers do. The flycatcher in the tree line was definitely not a Great Crested Flycatcher.

It is important to be familiar with all the basics of regularly occurring bird species in your home territory: their comparative size and appearance; their distinctive habits; the general habitat and area where they may more regularly show up; how common they are relative to other common species in the area; and the distinguishing field marks that set them apart from other very similar species. Then, when something "different" shows up, you can say, "Whoa, that bird is not one of our usual suspects!" Another factor to consider is the time of year. This particular sighting took place August 30, a time when migration is in full swing, and birders should be alert for any unusual or different species to show up almost anywhere.

With a very slow and deliberate pace I was able to approach the "different" flycatcher as it continued its sorties from the tree after flying insects. While it retreated higher in the tree as I approached, and even moved to a different tree, it did allow close enough approach to obtain this documenting photograph of an Eastern Wood Pewee. (*top*) While the Eastern Wood Pewee range map shows it to be a regular summer resident throughout most of the eastern United States, it is more commonly found in deep woods, but only occurs in southern Florida during migration. This bird was only the second one we have documented on our property, and the first one was many years ago. It was apparently a migrating bird, for it only occurred that one day, and was gone that evening.

Birders often use a process of elimination when identifying "different" species of birds: Great Crested Flycatcher is much larger, has a yellow breast and rufous in the wings; Willow Flycatcher is browner and has a distinctive "eye-ring," a narrow fringe of lighter feathers around the eye; and the Eastern Phoebe is chunkier, darker, with an all-black bill, and most distinctively, pumps its tail up and down when perched. The Eastern Wood Pewee is more slender than the Phoebe; lighter colored; has no eye-ring; yellow/orange on the lower mandible of the bill; and gray on the breast with a central whitish area that makes it appear to be wearing a vest.

We humans are accustomed to unconsciously familiarizing ourselves with the specific, particular and peculiar characteristics of all our fellow humans with whom we come into regular contact. We get so good at it that we can identify a loved one or friend clear across the mall parking lot simply by observing general characteristics such as

size, shape and perhaps walking gait, even though he or she is so far away that we cannot see his or her face.

The same techniques apply with birds. All we need to do is observe and familiarize ourselves with all specific, particular and peculiar characteristics of all the birds with which we come into regular contact. Then, as with human strangers, we can recognize that a new encounter with one, human or bird, is "different." So when an encyclopedia salesman shows up at the front door one can say, "That's somebody different." What - encyclopedias aren't sold door to door anymore? What - nobody buys encyclopedias anymore, like my Dad did for us, as kids, from just such a stranger? What - I should use a better example of a "different" person at the front door? Perhaps like the umbrella repairman who came around door to door periodically? Well, this is about birds, so just keep looking for that "different" bird, which is probably just looking for a handout, and not looking to sell you anything. You never know, it might be something truly spectacular.



For more information on the Eastern Wood Pewee, see: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Wood-Pewee/id

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