

Ash-throated Flycatcher

June 2025 - BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Ash-throated Flycatcher is a welcome local breeder to Southern California each spring. The eight inch Flycatcher spends the cold winter months in coastal Mexico and Central America before its annual return to breed in the arid southwest. It nests primarily in tree cavities excavated in previous nesting seasons by enterprising woodpeckers. The mated pair fills those empty holes with sticks and plant matter along with a comforting bed of scruffy mammal fur sometimes seen being selectively scavenged from discarded owl pellets and coyote scat.

Like many other desert tolerant animals such as the kangaroo rat, Ash-throated Flycatchers don't need to drink water. They get all the moisture they need from the variety of insects and occasional fruit they eat.

We are alerted to the presence of this tall, lanky flycatcher with a large head topped with a brown bushy crest when it sallies out to snatch a grasshopper from a mid-level tree branch. Its erect stance and dull brown upper-parts are offset by a very pale, ashen throat & breast and a pale, buttery yellow belly. Watch for reddish, rufous tones on its shortish wings and long flashing tail.

We are greeted early morning by its whistling two-note "ka-brick" call, repeated in series. It also gives a high, shrill "wher'r'r'r" that sounds surprisingly like a police whistle! Take notice of this friendly signal of its presence where you'll see it deftly snapping up insects.

Photos by James Kendall Written by Betty Kanne

