



Phenology at Play Script

NOTE: The characters in this skit are anthropomorphized; this is a dramatization to represent what might happen to a flycatcher.

Narrator: Our story begins in Central America in late winter. The days are getting cooler, and there are fewer insects for the flycatchers. It is time to head north. The flycatcher starts out one evening guided by unknown constants that enable him to find his way to his summer habitat. Does he use the stars (as ancient sailors did), the moon, or perhaps the magnetic field that protects the planet Earth? Scientists are still trying to answer this question. Regardless of the forces at play, the flycatcher continues to arrive at its nesting grounds each spring at the same time.

Male Flycatcher: Finally, I am back in this beautiful oak savanna! Time to find a branch and start singing so I can claim this land as my own. *(Finds a step to stand on, puffs up and begins to sing or whistle. The Acadian flycatcher's song sounds like "flee-sick.")* Ah, there is an attractive flycatcher. I need to sing louder so she sees me. *(Sings louder)* Nothing. Oh, there is a fly! Maybe that will get her attention. I'll show her that I am good at getting dinner. *(Jumps up and grabs a fly.)* Here you go, Miss.

Narrator: Nature follows a path laid down thousands of years ago. The female flycatcher chirps and accepts the fly, and the two birds build a nest together. The male flycatcher continues to sing and catch flies and other insects for the female, while she sits on the eggs. About two weeks later, the flycatcher eggs hatch about the same time as thousands of caterpillars hatch. The hungry larvae begin feeding on the oak tree that houses the flycatcher family.

Oak tree: Ouch, ouch, ouch! I need help—these caterpillars are eating my leaves! Without leaves I cannot photosynthesize enough energy to produce acorns. I won't be able to grow enough for all the animals that depend on me for food, much less have any left over to grow new oaks! My future is dim.

Female Flycatcher: *(To the oak tree)* We will help! We have lived here in your branches and raised our family here, so we will pick off those flies and caterpillars from your leaves! Your leaves sheltered us from the rain last week while I kept my eggs warm. It is the least we can do. You can count on us—our name comes from our ability to catch flying insects in midair. Our chicks love the larval stage of insects, especially fat, plump caterpillars! Thank you so much. We will help you, as you have helped us.

