

Thick-billed Kingbird at Presqu'ile Provincial Park: New to Ontario

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Figure 1. Thick-billed Kingbird at Calf Pasture, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, 29 August 2012.

Photo: Bruce M. Di Labio.



ON THE EVENING OF Tuesday, 28 August 2012, Bill Gilmour decided to bike along Bayshore Drive at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, to look for Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) from the bridge at the Calf Pasture. As he cycled along the road, he heard an unfamiliar call. He traced the call to a large flycatcher perched atop a tree. To his astonishment, it was a THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD!

After numerous phone calls, several local birders were fortunate to see this incredible rarity and obtain photos, videos and audio recordings as the light

faded. That evening, the alert went out across Ontario. Everyone was hoping, or more likely praying, that the kingbird would stay overnight.

At daybreak on 29 August, the Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) appeared to the delight of everyone present and spent most of the day feeding in the same general area where it was discovered on 28 August. It appeared to be in good health, catching and eating dragonflies and other insects. Much of its behaviour was very similar to that of the Olive-sided Flycatcher feeding (*Contopus cooperi*),

foraging within a small area and repeatedly returning to the top of the same tree (Figure 1). More than 150 birders came to view the kingbird that day. It was very cooperative, perching and foraging in the open (Figure 2); no doubt thousands of photographs were taken of the bird! That evening the kingbird roosted overnight in willow trees along Calf Pasture Point.

On 30 August, the kingbird was not as cooperative and disappeared for part of the day. Fortunately, it was re-located during the late afternoon as it sat in a large dead tree overlooking the cove at the north end of Atkins Lane at Calf Pasture.

The kingbird was even more elusive the following morning, 31 August. It would occasionally vanish for up to 30 minutes and then suddenly reappear. It was spending more time at the Calf Pasture Point area catching bugs and returning to perch on trees on the point. The kingbird was last reported late that morning. A disappointed group of birders waited at the roost site that evening but unfortunately the bird did not appear. Those birders who did not make it during the week arrived on Saturday morning, 1 September. They searched for hours, but by mid-afternoon it became apparent the kingbird was no longer present.

This bird was identified as an adult female (Cranford 2013). In contrast, most of the extralimital records of Thick-billed Kingbird in western North America are suspected of referring to immature birds (Roberson 1980:258-259).

This amazing record is another reminder that birds fly and anything is possible. This sighting is the first record for Ontario, the second for Canada, and



Figure 2. Thick-billed Kingbird on a foraging flight, Presqu'île Provincial Park, 29 August 2012. Photo: Bruce M. Di Labio.

the first documented record in eastern North America. The first Canadian record was at Qualicum Beach, British Columbia in 1974; that bird was present from 20 October to 11 November (Campbell *et al.* 1997:536). It was found dead below a window on 12 November. The specimen, an immature male, was prepared into a study skin at the Royal British Columbia Museum (specimen # 14750). Ironically even W.E. Godfrey (1986:368) in *The Birds of Canada* listed it as "Not to be expected" in Canada.

The Thick-billed Kingbird ranges primarily throughout western Mexico (Lowther *et al.* 2020). It was first found nesting in the United States in 1958, at Guadalupe Canyon in southeastern Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1964:79). Since then it has become an uncommon but regular resident breeder in extreme southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico (Lowther *et al.* 2020).

Like some other tyrannid flycatchers, the Thick-billed Kingbird is known to wander north of its breeding range. It is

a casual stray to southern California, with 27 accepted records between 1965 and 2019 (D. Roberson, pers. comm.). In addition to the 1974 British Columbia record described above (eBird 2020), there are also documented records for Colorado (1992, 2018), Nevada (1996, 2017), Utah (2009) and North Dakota (2018).

On 28 September 1986 — 26 years before the Thick-billed Kingbird sighting — the first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher — the first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*) was documented in Ontario and Canada (Gawn 1987). Remarkably, that bird was also at Presqu'île near the Calf Pasture! What's even more interesting is that both birds occupy a similar range in Mexico and a very limited range in southeastern Arizona.



Long Point Birders Cottage

331 Erie Blvd is steps away
from migration hotspots
Old Cut Bird Observatory
and Long Point Provincial Park

SPRING, SUMMER & FALL RENTALS

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