

This month's identification problem focuses on a species whose erect posture, broad-based and relatively flat bill, prominent rictal bristles, and big-headed appearance all suggest that the bird is a flycatcher. The pictured flycatcher clearly has no eye ring, although it does have at least one pronounced wing bar and conspicuously pale-edged tertials. More importantly, the throat and upper breast appear to be dusky in rather marked contrast to the sides, flanks, and belly. An additional clue, but only a clue, is that the bird appears to be at a nest hole, as evidenced by the presence of a small insect, or possibly a fecal sac, in its bill.

The size of the bird's bill and its lack of an eye ring eliminate all the *Empidonax* flycatchers from consideration. In addition, the short primary extension on top of the relatively long tail removes the Eastern Wood-Pewee as a candidate. Western Kingbird might seem like a good choice because the bird in the photograph appears to have a tail with pale outer edges; however, the darkness of the head and back, the prominent wing bar, and the erect (not more horizontal) posture all suggest that the bird is not a Western Kingbird.

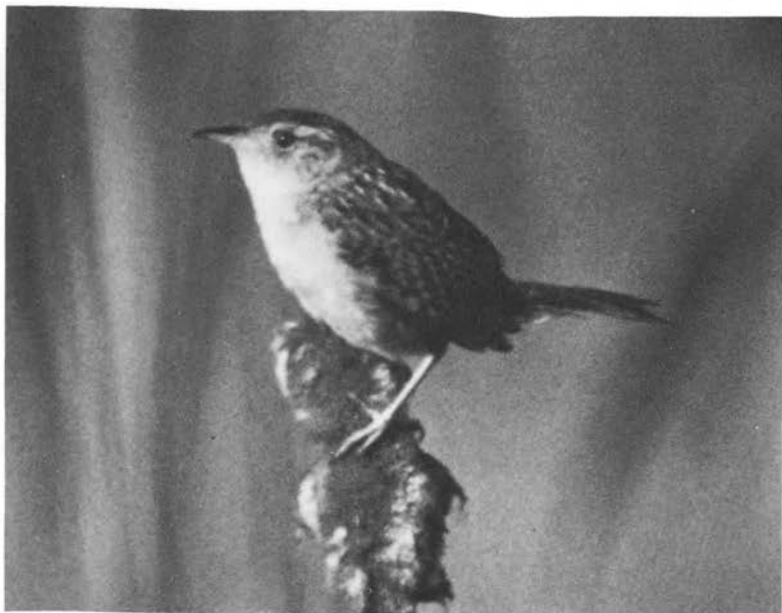
What is left? Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*): a large, hole-nesting flycatcher with lemon yellow underparts; a gray throat and upper breast; no eye ring; and a broad, flat bill, the lower mandible of which is pale orange at the base. What we cannot see in the photograph is the species' characteristic rusty tail and bushy crest. This widespread and noisy bird is fairly common throughout most of Massachusetts.



Photo by Ralph M. Care. Courtesy of MAS.

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Robert C. Bradbury



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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