

NOTES

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FIRST WINTER RECORD OF AN EASTERN KINGBIRD IN FLORIDA

REED BOWMAN¹, P. WILLIAM SMITH², AND JOHN W. FITZPATRICK¹

¹Archbold Biological Station,

P.O. Box 2057,

Lake Placid, Florida 33852

²South Florida Natural Resources Center,

Everglades National Park,

40001 State Road 9336,

Homestead, Florida 33034

Eastern Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) are common spring and summer residents throughout most of Florida, except the Keys (Howell 1932, Stevenson and Anderson 1994), but they winter exclusively in South America, returning to Florida beginning in March. Fall migration peaks in late August to early September, when large flocks commonly are seen (Lesser *in litt*, Howell 1932, Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Numbers dwindle rapidly after mid-September. Although a few late stragglers have been reported as late as November (Howell 1932, Stimson 1951, Edscorn 1976, 1979), none of these reports has been well documented. Although Eastern Kingbirds are reported frequently during Christmas Bird Counts from Florida and many other southeastern coastal states (e.g., Root 1988), no specimens or photographs exist to confirm the presence of this species in winter (Nov.-Feb.) from Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The latest Florida specimen was taken at Dog Island, Franklin Co., on 30 October 1965 (FSU #4600g, Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

On 27-28 December 1994, we observed and photographed an Eastern Kingbird along County Road 29, about 4 miles SE of Lake Placid, Highlands County, Florida (27° 15' N, 81° 17' W). The kingbird was encountered and identified independently twice at the same location during the Lake Placid Christmas Bird Count, on 27 December 1994, first by PWS and party at 0930 EST and then by JWF and party at 1530 EST at the same location. On 28 December, RB photographed the kingbird and more than 20 birders observed it at various times throughout the day. Brooks Atherton recorded the bird on video on 1 January 1995. The videotape was deposited with the FOS Records Committee (B. Pranty, pers. comm.). The kingbird was last observed on 6 January 1995.

When first spotted, the kingbird was perching in and foraging from a clump of low shrubs (*Myrica spp.*) on the north side of a small borrow pit. Also present were 1-2 each Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*T. forficatus*) and Western Kingbirds (*T. verticalis*). The birds remained at this site for 10-15 minutes, then flew north into a more densely forested area. When observed on the afternoon of the 27th, the group had increased to include 4 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and at least 6 Western Kingbirds. All the flycatchers, including the Eastern Kingbird, were perched in the upper, bare branches of red maples (*Acer ruber*) or on utility wires near the road. The birds foraged by sallying 1 to 5 m into the air, then returning to their perches. The kingbird was silent on all occasions. This location has been a traditional wintering site for both *T. forficatus* and *T. verticalis* since the late 1980s, having been observed on 4 and 6, respectively, of the last 8 Lake Placid CBCs (F. E. Lohrer, compiler 1987-1992, G. E. Woolfenden, compiler 1993-1994, pers. comm.).

On both 27 and 28 December, we observed the Eastern Kingbird with 10 × 40X Zeiss binoculars and a 64X Questar telescope, in good light, for more than an hour at distances from 5 to 20 m. The bird appeared slightly smaller than the Western Kingbirds, with a noticeably smaller black bill, and white throat and underparts (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) photographed on 28 December 1994 in Highlands County, Florida (photographed by Reed Bowman).

The face was nearly coal-black and the crown and head appeared a dusky brownish-black. The dark head was sharply demarcated against the white throat, below the eye. Although not noticeable in the photograph, a small, washed-out orange crown patch was visible through the telescope. The upperparts were grayish-brown and the back was interspersed with coal-black feathers. The overall "shabby" appearance of the bird was consistent with mid-winter body molt typical of Eastern Kingbirds on their wintering grounds (JWF, pers. obs.). The tail was dusky brown, and seemed at first to lack any white terminal margin. When the bird preened, however, we observed two jet-black, half-grown inner rectrices (probably the innermost pair), with broad white tips. This also is consistent with typical kingbird molting patterns. Through the telescope, the very pale tips of worn, unmolted rectrices were observed. The highly contrasting dark-above, light-below plumage and the white-tipped tail definitively rule out all other possible flycatcher species, including any possible stragglers from the tropics.

Misidentifications may comprise many of the Eastern Kingbird reports from Florida Christmas Bird Counts. The smaller Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) is a common winter resident in mainland Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Although it has dull yellowish-white underparts, grayish-olive upperparts, lacks a white-tipped tail, and frequently bobs its tail, the Eastern Phoebe in certain light conditions can resemble a kingbird, especially when holding its tail still. The Gray Kingbird (*T. dominicensis*), rare anywhere in Florida during the winter and relatively rare in Florida inland during any time of the year (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), also lacks a white tail tip, has light-gray upperparts, and has an oversized, heavy bill. The Loggerhead Kingbird (*T. caudifasciatus*) is a rare winter vagrant (ca. 3-4 Nov.-Mar. records, 4-5 reports) to extreme southern Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden

1992). This species has a less conspicuous, dull-white or pale-grayish tip to the rectrices, and a much heavier bill than does the Eastern Kingbird. An immature or molting adult Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*T. savana*) lacks a white tail tip, but has a small bill like an Eastern Kingbird, unlike other possible similar *Tyrannus*. Even immature Fork-tailed Flycatchers would likely show at least some elongation of the tail (see photo by S. LeFrance in Boyle et al. 1984). No documented sightings of *T. savana* exist from Florida during mid-winter (Dec.-Feb.), when the species is breeding in South America.

We believe that our observations represent the first documented winter occurrence of an Eastern Kingbird from Florida. Although our search was not exhaustive, we found no confirmed winter records from several other coastal states (Imhof 1976, Oberholser 1976, J. V. Remsen pers. comm.) nor from California (Small 1994). We therefore suspect that this occurrence represents the first verifiable record from North America in winter.

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