

LATE BREEDING AND EARLY WINTER RECORDS OF EASTERN KINGBIRD IN LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA

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The Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) is a common nesting bird in Florida with a breeding season that occasionally extends into early September. Breeding activities for the species, which is an early fall migrant, have previously been noted only as late as 15 September in the state (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The bulk of migrants usually depart Florida by the middle of September (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The Eastern Kingbird has been fully documented as a wintering bird only once: a single individual, discovered on the Lake Placid Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on 27 December 1994 and present until 6 January 1995, was photographed by Reed Bowman on 28 December 1994, and videotaped by Brooks Atherton on 1 January 1995 (Bowman et al. 1995). Other reported sightings in early winter in Florida and southeastern North America have lacked hard documentation and are assumed to have been misidentifications (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, LeGrand 1997). Any unseasonal Eastern Kingbird sightings in North America require thorough documentation.

In the fall and winter seasons of 1998-99, in Leon County, unusually late breeding and wintering dates were recorded for Eastern Kingbird. The winter sightings were confirmed by multiple observers, and documented with videotape. Unlike the previous winter record, the sightings reported here consisted of multiple individuals.

On 7 October 1998 while driving past a location where I had noticed a territorial pair of Eastern Kingbirds throughout the summer, I was surprised to see two kingbirds still present. As I watched, one of the kingbirds approached the other with an insect in its bill, whereupon the second bird began to beg. In response to the submissive posture and rapidly fluttering wings of the begging bird, the first bird fed it and departed. Within a few minutes, the behavior was repeated. The noticeably shorter tail and repeated begging behavior indicated that this bird was a dependent fledgling.

Two kingbirds were still present at this site through 17 October, and at least one was still present until 22 October. The site, at the intersection of Tharpe Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, was an overgrown urban lot with a nearby row of pines and scattered live oaks. The birds may not have been detected on later visits as they ranged the area surrounding the intersection. The urban location of the sighting, and the scarcity of Eastern Kingbirds in general at such late dates, indicated to me that all of these October sightings were of the same birds.

By mid-September migrant Eastern Kingbirds have become scarce in the Tallahassee area; lingerers are usually represented by lone birds (G. Menk pers. comm.). I was therefore surprised to find at least six kingbirds at Sunset Landing on Lake Jackson on 30 September 1998. As their appearance coincided with the passage of Hurricane Georges, I theorized that these birds may have been migrants forced back to the north by the storm, in "reverse migration", as has been reported for other migrant landbirds encountering late season tropical storms (DeBenedictis 1986). My belief in this theory was reinforced by the presence of a flock of Purple Martins conservatively estimated at 73 individuals, a large assemblage for such a late date, on the same day also at Lake Jackson.

On 3 November 1998 while birding at Sunset Landing, I encountered and videotaped a group of ten Eastern Kingbirds at the same spot where I had encountered the kingbirds on 30 September. As I watched, these birds rose up high into the air and flew together towards the south along the western shoreline of the lake.

Over the next two months, a small flock of Eastern Kingbirds was consistently present along the western edge of Lake Jackson. Gail Menk reported six kingbirds on 3 December, numbers ranging from one to five between 5 December and 26 December, and three on the Tallahassee Christmas Bird Count on 1 January 1999. The latest sighting was of two birds by Menk on 3 January 1999. Others who observed the kingbirds during December and January include Scott Borderieux and Jim Cavanagh. The observers are all experienced birders extensively familiar with Eastern Kingbirds as well as similar species with which this species might be confused (i.e., Eastern Phoebe). No observers noted any vocalizations. The kingbird flock disappeared after early January, possibly because of an influx of cold weather.

These sightings constitute the second documented winter record, and the first record of multiple wintering Eastern Kingbirds in Florida. If the previous Florida record was indeed the only fully documented winter record for the United States, as has been speculated (Bowman et al. 1995), then the Leon County sightings represent an all-time winter maximum for the United States.

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