

557-01-2001

Rare Bird Documentation for PORC:

Species: Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

Number: 1

Sex, age, plumage: Probable juvenile

Date/time of observation:

04 Oct, 2001 @ around 18:00

Location:

Nockamixon State Park in Bedminster Township, Bucks County, PA.

Bird was seen around a field where Mink Road intersects with an unmarked gravel park access road, nameless, but commonly referred to as Yost School Rd West.

Observer(s):

Bill Etter

1030 Old Bethlehem Road #2

Perkasie, PA 18944

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Habitat: The bird was seen around an open field. This area was cleared of second growth scrub and multiflora a few years ago, and replanted with native grasses and borders of food crop (corn, sunflower, sorghum, etc.). A small stand of younger trees and a few lone spruces were left intact. Brush piles edge the field, which backs up directly to mature forest on the northwest side.

Conditions: Mostly clear with sun low in sky, but still above treetops. There was good light and the sun was behind me for most of the encounter. Bird was mostly to my north.

Distance + Optics:

Bird originally flew directly overhead within 20-30 feet, and then was in treetops about 30 feet overhead about 20 feet in front of me. I had to back up for better perspective. Bird then flew across the field and perched at the top of a pile of brush about 200 feet away, where it remained for about a minute. Viewed the entire time with 10x24 binoculars.

Description:

From my post to the PA Birds listserv, which was written within the hour:

“While checking the Mink Road fields for sparrows this evening, I found a Western Kingbird at about 6:00. The bird had a very pale breast and throat, possibly a juvenile. It was flushed up from out of a patch of corn, much to my surprise, and flew overhead from treetop to treetop before moving across the field to a patch of dead brush. I got a nice, relatively close look at it before it made off over the treetops”

From my notes, also written right after the observation, slightly paraphrased for sake of clarity:

“... had what at first seemed to be a(n Eastern) Kingbird, which would have been the first in about a month. It fluttered up out of the cornfield (or possibly flew low over it, though I'm pretty sure it was roosting in there...) and perched in treetop above me. As soon as it landed, I could see that it was far too pale on head and back for E Kingbird. It turned toward me -saw the bright breast and pale yellow belly and realized it was at least Western Kingbird. Checked and double-checked to make sure I wasn't looking at Phoebe, which are all over up there, but it was too big and too pale. Throat and breast was very bright, back a silvery gray to olive, sides a little darker. Belly a pale yellow wash- lighter than I'd expected from pictures. Tail had white lining. No terminal band. Bill much more substantial than Phoebe. Cheeks light- bright even- really stood out. When it flew across the field, flight was different than E Kingbird- smoother, more direct, and less belabored. Bird was silent.”

I would add that I didn't observe any 'tail-flicking' or similar habits. With other tyrant flycatchers in mind, I searched for any field marks that might be helpful, but found nothing. The overall paleness of this bird, particularly of yellow on belly, sets it apart from Couch's/Tropical/Cassin's. This difference was even more pronounced since the bird appeared to be a juvenile. Color of back and breast, and light edges on tail go further toward eliminating these other suspects. Diminutive head and bill further eliminate Couch's/Tropical.

Behavior: It seemed that I flushed the bird out of the patch of corn. It was late enough in the day, so maybe it had already gone to roost. Once in the treetops, it became active. It was at this point that I got my best looks from several angles as it moved around. After a minute or so, it flew across the field and perched on a brushpile. It remained more or less motionless there for a minute or more. It was facing me at this point, so I got a good look at the face, head and breast. As I began to walk down the field for a different vantage point, the bird flew away. I was unable to relocate it.

Vocalizations: None

Supporting evidence: None

Previous experience: I've had no other experience with any of the western *tyrannus* flycatchers, other than a puzzling bird that was at the Cape May lighthouse a few years ago. I believe it was eventually identified as a possible Western/Gray hybrid. In any case, it gave me cause to check a number of references at the time.

Certainty of identification: I am confident in my identification of this bird.

References consulted: I immediately checked all of the field guides (Peterson, Sibley, National Geographic, etc.) as soon as I got home. My only main concern at the time was the degree of paleness in the yellow belly, which was quickly resolved by Sibley's illustration of juvenile Western kingbird.

Date of report: 8 Oct, 2001. Submitted Jan 2002 with 4th quarter '01 report for *Pennsylvania Birds*.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Western Kingbird (Tyrannus verticalis)

Date of Sighting: 4 October 2001 to 4 October 2001

Location: NOCKAMIXON STATE PARK

County: BUCKS

Observer(s): Bill Etter

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Bill Etter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

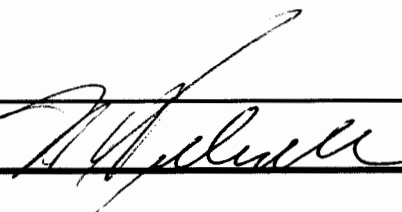
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Heathcote			X					
P. Hess			X					
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
R. Leberman			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 2/12/03