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AN EARLY TROPICAL KINGBIRD REPORT FROM FLORIDA, BASED ON CALLS

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In the most recent list of Florida birds (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992), Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) is listed as an "unverified straggler," based on the difficulty of distinction between it and the Couch's Kingbird (*T. couchii*). Although there are about 25 reports of this "complex" in Florida since 1942, only three individuals have been identified by vocalizations, all of them *couchii*. This prompted me to look at my field notes of the only "Tropical Kingbird" I ever saw in Florida, and I discovered I had written a description of its call, which to me clearly indicated it as *T. melancholicus*.

I observed this bird at the Key West cemetery, Monroe County, 15 April 1957, in an amazing *Tyrannus* assemblage of 2 Western Kingbirds (*T. verticalis*), 2 Gray Kingbirds (*T. dominicensis*), 2 Eastern Kingbirds (*T. tyrannus*) and 13 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*T. forficatus*). My written description (paraphrased) attempted to distinguish it from nearby Western Kingbirds: bill noticeably larger than that of Western, approaching that of Gray; throat whiter, back slightly more olive, and yellow slightly richer and extends farther onto the breast than in Western; tail brownish, notched. I described the call as *pit pit pit pit pit*, the tempo reminiscent of a Gray Kingbird but each note with the tone of an Eastern Kingbird. This is still how I would describe the call of a Tropical Kingbird, very different from the single *tzheer* (Smith 1966) or *gweer* (Kaufman 1983) call of the Couch's. I have encountered both species on many occasions in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, where they are common (although rarely together), and discovered the latter species in Belize (Wood and Paulson 1988) by its vocalizations. The calls of the two species were so different that I was never in doubt about the identity of calling birds. Smith (1966), in his study of kingbird vocalizations, considered the two species very different. The only call of the Couch's that included repeated sequences of notes was the chatter vocalization, apparently given only at the nest, and, in the sonagrams in that paper, that call was clearly distinct from the typical repeated-note call of the Tropical.

I consider this a good example of the value of detailed field notes. I described the call to differentiate the bird from the only species—Western and Cassin's (*T. vociferans*) kingbirds—with which I thought it might be confused, not suspecting my notes would allow me years later to resolve a much more difficult identification problem.

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