
January 1995

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Recommended Citation

Duncan, Robert A. (1995) "Migration of The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in The Florida Panhandle," *Florida Field Naturalist*. Vol. 23 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol23/iss3/3>

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MIGRATION OF THE SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER IN THE FLORIDA PANHANDLE

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The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) occupies open country, grasslands, scrub, and savanna, and breeds from eastern New Mexico, southeastern Colorado, to southern Texas. It winters in southern Louisiana (casually) and in southern Florida, and in Middle America south to central Costa Rica and rarely to western Panama (A.O.U. 1983).

In Florida, this flycatcher is a regular but rare to uncommon transient in fall and spring, especially noticeable in the Panhandle and along the Gulf Coast and rare to locally common winter visitor in the Keys and southern peninsula (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Stevenson and Anderson (1994) report flocks of 20 or more individuals wintering along the southern end of Lake Okeechobee, the Kendall area, and the Keys. In the extreme western panhandle, it is a rare but regular transient in spring and fall (Duncan 1988), usually being found on exposed perches such as power lines, fences or isolated bushes or trees at migrant traps such as Ft. Pickens or Gulf Breeze.

During fall migration in the tropics Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been observed in numbers moving south or southeast during daylight hours and at dusk (Bent 1963). Stevenson (1957) lacked information if it were a trans-Gulf or circum-Gulf migrant. It has not been established whether or not it cuts across the Gulf to its south Florida wintering grounds. On three occasions I observed Scissor-tailed Flycatcher movements in the Florida Panhandle that indicated it is probably a diurnal, circum-Gulf migrant in fall in transit to wintering grounds in south Florida and the Keys. All three observations were made from the tip of the Santa Rosa Peninsula at Gulf Breeze, Santa Rosa County, Florida. The peninsula extends westward into Pensacola Bay. A barrier island lies about 5 km south of Gulf Breeze and the mainland 5 km north and west.

On 13 November 1993 an adult bird was observed flying east in mid-afternoon with a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*) as they came in over the point from out over Pensacola Bay. The bird was flying very high; the warblers appeared as specks in 10X binoculars. The flycatcher was picked out of the flock by its very long forked tail. As the flock flew over the peninsula, it descended to a lower elevation allowing the pink sides and wing coverts of the flycatcher to be easily seen.

On 22 October 1994 I observed at about 10 a.m. two birds flying east over Pensacola Bay 150-200 m high. I watched them in 10X binoculars until they were out of sight. The birds flew ahead of a squall line that was approaching from the northwest. On 23 October 1994 I observed three birds at about 10:30 a.m. as they arrived out of the west from over the bay and settled on the first available bush at the tip of the point.

In each instance above, the flycatchers were detected coming from the west and had crossed about 5 km of open water. These diurnal, easterly movements strongly suggest that the flycatchers were migrating towards wintering areas in south Florida. The species does not winter in the Panhandle. I believe that at least part of the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers' migration is diurnal, and that the bird uses an overland route around the Gulf of Mexico to reach south Florida.

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