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Species Snapshot No 3: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

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Species Snapshot No. 3: Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

This is the third installment in our regular feature presenting a brief synopsis of the banding and encounter records submitted to the Bird Banding Laboratory for a particular species. Each installment will feature a new species; suggestions for species to be covered or data to be presented are welcome. Space limitations of *North American Bird Bander* prohibit any in-depth analysis of the data and these notes are not meant to show any trends in population parameters such as population density or growth rate, geographic distribution, etc. and should not be viewed as a definitive analysis of the status of the species.

Although the banding program began in the 1920s, the currently available digital records for banding data include only those records from 1960 to the present (pre-1960 banding data are available in other formats, however). All encounters, including those of birds banded before 1960, are available in digital format. As no Scissor-tailed Flycatchers banded before 1960 have been encountered, the following summary includes only those birds banded and encountered between 1960 and 7 Apr 2017 (date of data request to Bird Banding Laboratory).

Banded birds

Numbers and Age and Sex Categories

Since 1960, 4,808 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been banded in North and Central America (Table 1). Sex was recorded for only 29% of the birds banded ($n = 1,395$); 51% of these were males and 49% were females. Of the 711 flycatchers identified as males, 87% were aged as SY, ASY, or AHY ($n = 618$) compared to 13% aged as L, HY or U ($n = 93$). Of the 684 flycatchers identified as females, 87% were aged as SY, ASY, or AHY ($n = 593$) compared to 13% aged as L, HY, or U ($n = 91$). More than half (57%) of all banded flycatchers were aged as L ($n = 2,757$); 96% of these were recorded as unknown sex.

Geographic distribution

Since 1960, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been banded in 11 of the United States ($n = 4,023$), three Central American countries ($n = 783$), and

one Canadian province ($n = 2$) (Figure 1). Nearly 97% of the 4,025 flycatchers banded in the US and Canada were banded in just two states: Texas ($n = 2,655$) and Oklahoma ($n = 1,240$). Nearly all of the 783 flycatchers banded in Central America were banded in El Salvador ($n = 718$) compared to 37 in Costa Rica and 28 in Mexico.

Seasonal distribution

Ninety-four percent ($n = 3,786$) of the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers banded in the United States and Canada were banded between May and Aug (approximate breeding season); none were banded between Nov and Feb (approximate overwintering season). Only 4% and 2% were banded during Sep and Oct (approximate fall migration season) and Mar and Apr (approximate spring migration season), respectively. The extreme dates of flycatcher banding in the United States are 28 Mar and 29 Oct; both bandings were made in Texas.

Conversely, just 2% ($n = 17$) of all flycatchers banded in Central America were banded between May and Aug compared to 48% ($n = 372$) banded between Nov and Feb. Half ($n = 393$) of the flycatchers banded in Central America were banded during Mar and Apr. Only one flycatcher was banded in Central America between Sep and Oct.

Encounters

Since 1960, only five banded Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been encountered (Table 1). A SY-U banded in El Salvador in Feb 1979 was recaptured at the same location one month later. One L-U, banded near Austin, TX, in Aug 1976, was “caught by hand” (encounter code 28) 25 miles SSW of its banding location less than three weeks later. Another L-U, banded near Cedar Hill, TX, in Jun 1972, was hit and killed by a car 20 miles E of its banding location four months later. A third L-U, banded near Grand Prairie, TX, in Jun 1970, was hit and killed by a car 10 miles W of its banding location in Oct 1971. This represents the longest period between banding and encounter and is also the longevity record for Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (minimum age at encounter is 1 yr 4 mo). Lastly, an AHY-M banded on Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma in May 2014

was recaptured one month later in a Brown-headed Cowbird trap located 16 miles E on Fort Sill Military Reservation. This bird, along with two other flycatchers captured in the trap, was released at that location. Thus, 4 of 5 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher were encountered within 4 months after banding; all 5 were encountered within about 25 miles of their banding location. (Note: The accuracy of the calculated distance between banding location and encounter location depends on the precision of the coordinates reported for those locations, i.e., exact,

1-min block, or 10-min block.)

Acknowledgements

I thank the more than 100 permit holders who have banded Scissor-tailed Flycatchers over the decades, all the individuals who reported encounters, and staff at the Bird Banding Laboratory for supplying the data.

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Table 1. Number of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers banded and encountered in North and Central America between 1960 and 7 Apr 2017 by age at banding and sex (either sex at banding or sex updated upon encounter). Data for birds banded before 1960 are not included in BBL electronic files unless the bird was later encountered. As no birds banded before 1960 have been encountered, their records are not included in the banded birds data.

Age code	Banded birds				Encountered birds			
	Male	Female	Unknown	Total	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
AHY	560	534	123	1,217	1	0	0	1
HY	41	37	358	436	0	0	0	0
L	51	52	2,654	2,757	0	0	3	3
SY	10	21	222	253	0	0	1	1
ASY	48	38	0	86	0	0	0	0
Unknown	1	2	56	59	0	0	0	0
Total	711	684	3,413	4,808	1	0	4	5

Figure 1. Geographic distribution of banding locations of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (n = 4,023) in the United States banded between 1960 and 7 Apr 2017. Not shown: El Salvador (n = 718), Costa Rica (n = 37), Mexico (n = 28), and Ontario (n = 2).

