

First photographically documented record of Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) for the United States

JOHN C. ARVIN • GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY • 103 WEST HIGHWAY 332 • LAKE JACKSON, TEXAS 77566 • (EMAIL: jarvin@gco.org)

MARK W. LOCKWOOD • 402 EAST HARRIET AVENUE • ALPINE, TEXAS 79830 • (EMAIL: mark.lockwood@tpwd.state.tx.us)

Abstract

We present the first fully documented record of Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) for the United States, a single bird present at Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park, Hidalgo County, Texas from 7–14 January 2005.

Field encounter

On 7 January 2005, Arvin discovered a Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*) near the headquarters of the World Birding Center, located adjacent to

Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park, Hidalgo County, Texas (Figures 1, 2). The bird was initially heard calling from a row of Huisache (*Acacia smallii*) along an irrigation canal on the northern border of the state park. It disappeared before it could be photographed but was relocated on 8 January along the edge of a resaca (an oxbow lake of the Rio Grande) within the state park. This former tent-camping area has manicured grass with numerous large trees and a dense, narrow woodland along the edge

of the resaca. For much of the duration of the observation, the bird remained largely hidden from view, occasionally making sallies up to the tops of the trees. It was not particularly vocal, calling only irregularly. Initially, it was highly responsive to playback, but this behavior diminished with exposure.

In addition to occasional sallies for insects, the bird was observed eating fruits of Anacua (*Ehretia anacua*) and Sugar Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*). During the remainder of its stay, it moved between the former tent-camping area and the adjacent densely wooded portions of the state park, primarily frequenting the canopy and edges of the taller woodland. It remained in this area through 14 January. Photographs taken on that date (Figure 1) seem to show an injury that was not noticed prior to that day. The right leg appeared twisted and non-functional and its right flank was smeared with blood. The flycatcher was not seen after that date and is presumed to have succumbed to this injury.

Discussion

Social Flycatcher is a distinctly marked species. The individual observed at Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park had bright yellow underparts contrasting with olive-brown upperparts. Its wings and tail appeared



Figure 1. This Social Flycatcher exhibited plumage characteristics and behavior consistent with populations in northern Mexico. Although the species is not known to wander, this individual represents the second sighting in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. This photograph was taken on the final day of its week-long stay, 7–14 January 2005. Photograph by Geoff Malosh.

slightly more brownish in color than its upperparts. Its crown was a dark gray bordered by a broad white supercilium. The remainder of the head plumage consisted of a slaty gray "mask" (lores, auriculars, and adjacent plumage) and white throat. Its pale gray irides contrasted with this mask. Although concealed most of the time, its crimson central crown stripe was well seen by several observers on 9 January, when the bird was feeding low in a vine tangle. Its bill was small and somewhat triangular in shape. The bird's overall size was described as slightly shorter than that of a kingbird (*Tyrannus* species). It called occasionally, giving a distinctive, shrill *see-yh*. Less often, it broke into a longer vocalization. This vocalization was given mostly in response to playback and may be transcribed as *teeya*, *tortilla-tortilla-tortilla*. Arvin audio-recorded this vocalization on 9 January.

This plumage pattern of Social Flycatcher is shared with numerous Neotropical flycatchers. Of particular interest in the identification of this individual are Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*), which is locally common in southern Texas, and Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*), which occurs in northeastern Mexico but has not been recorded in the United States. Great Kiskadee is a larger bird with obvious rufous in the wings and tail. Its face pattern consists of black (as opposed to slaty gray) crown stripe and mask. It often displays its bright yellow central crown stripe in interactions with other birds. It is also vocally distinct. Boat-billed Flycatcher is similar in overall coloration, though lacking rufous tones, but is even larger than a Great Kiskadee and has a massive bill. It is also very distinctive vocally. In addition, a number of geographically remote species in the genera *Conopias*, *Philohydor* (merged by the American Ornithologists' Union [1998] with *Pitangus*), and *Phelpsia* share the "kiskadee" pattern. These could also be eliminated from consideration by a combination of plumage and vocal dif-

ferences. The very similar congeneric Rusty-margined Flycatcher (*M. cayanaensis*) has rufous inner webs on the primaries, has blackish (not gray) crown and mask stripes, and gives a long, thin, up-slurred whistle, a distinctive vocalization. Despite careful study, we were not able to determine the age of the Social Flycatcher in Texas.

Social Flycatcher ranges from northeastern Mexico south to Bolivia and Argentina (Howell and Webb 1995, Ridgely and Tudor 1994). In Mexico, the species' northernmost known population is found in central Tamaulipas in the drainages of the Río Corona and Río Purificación, within 200 km of the Río Grande. In Tamaulipas, Social Flycatchers are present year-round in low elevations, and, where forest has been cleared, occur up to an elevation of 1000 m (Arvin 2001). A well-described sight record of the species comes from Anzalduas County Park, Hidalgo County, Texas in 1991. This location is about 5 km downriver from Bentsen-Río Grande Valley State Park. This species is apparently not prone to wandering, and the two records from Texas are the only re-

ports away from the known range.

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Figure 2. On 7 January 2005 (here), the Social Flycatcher was largely quiet and remained within the woods' edge and canopy. Photograph by Pierre Howard.