

**SECOND VERIFIED RECORD OF THE COUCH'S / TROPICAL  
KINGBIRD COMPLEX (*TYRANNUS COUCHII* /  
*T. MELANCHOLICUS*) IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA**

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Flycatchers of the Couch's/Tropical Kingbird complex (*Tyrannus couchii*/*T. melancholicus*) are occasional migrants and winter residents in Florida, with about 20-25 reports (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Paulson 1994, Pranty 1996). A bird of this complex was collected (specimen, University of Central Florida) in early March 1996 on the Florida peninsula near Boca Raton. However, several authorities disagree on the correct species identification of this specimen (Mlodinow 1998). Until this dispute is resolved, no verified records exist for either Couch's or Tropical Kingbird in Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Pranty 1996).

In the Florida Panhandle, three occurrences document that this species complex is a rare, irregular spring and autumn transient. One individual was identified as a Tropical Kingbird before the species complex was described and split (Stedman and Lohrer 1976, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, B. Stedman pers. comm.) and D. Ware (pers. comm.) reevaluated his description of a kingbird originally reported as a Couch's (Ware *in* Pranty 1992). A photograph (TTRS P471) of another individual verifies the species complex; this bird was accepted by the FOSRC as a Couch's Kingbird based on description of its call (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). We document herein the second verified record of the Couch's/Tropical Kingbird Complex from the Florida Panhandle.

We closely observed a Couch's/Tropical Kingbird foraging from telephone wires and roadside vegetation near the end of Indian Peninsula, Gulf County, from 1035-1245 hr on 9 May 1996. The crown and nape of the bird were gray; a thin blackish eye-mask stood out in good light. The wings were brown and the back was grayish-olive. The tail was moderately notched, dark grayish-brown, and the tips of the tail feathers were slightly worn. The white chin contrasted with the upper breast which was bright yellow in the center fading into gray on the sides. The flanks and the rest of the undersides were bright yellow. A key field mark was the bill, which was much larger than an Eastern Kingbird's (*T. tyrannus*) and almost as large as a Gray Kingbird's (*T. dominicensis*), both of which perched on telephone wires within two meters of our bird. The overall size of our bird was similar to the Gray Kingbird and larger than the Eastern Kingbird. The moderately notched tail, absence of white in the outer tail feathers, and large bill, separate our bird from the other yellow-bellied kingbirds, the Western (*T. verticalis*) and Cassin's (*T. vociferans*). Although Paulson (1994) described the similarity in size of a Tropical Kingbird's bill to that of a Gray Kingbird's, and we carefully observed and recorded field marks, we were still not confident that we could identify the species because the bird never vocalized. We verified only the Couch's/Tropical Kingbird Complex (TTRS Photo pending).

# ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

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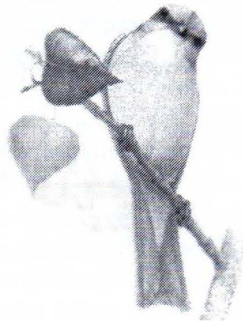
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Couch's Kingbird



Tropical Kingbird