

The First Record of Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2018.

Introduction and Distribution

The Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) is a large-sized passerine that is found breeding on the east coast of North America along the Atlantic Coast to northern Florida and near-shore islands of south Georgia, rarely to South Carolina and North Carolina; west along Gulf Coast to coastal islands of Mississippi (Smith and Jackson 2002). This species is also found in the Bahamas, potentially all the islands of Greater and Lesser Antilles south to Venezuela and possibly in northern Colombia (Smith and Jackson 2002).

The Gray Kingbird prefers open, coastal areas in generally dry habitats near water (Faaborg 1985). This species is also found near cultivated fields and is often in open sites around towns and houses (Johnston 1975a). Although most abundant in association with mangroves in North America, in limited numbers, the Gray Kingbird breeding range extends north of the range of mangroves (Sprunt 1954c, Toups and Jackson 1987). This species rarely breeds away from the coastline, but has been found 13 km inland from the Pensacola waterfront in Florida (Sprunt 1942) where it now regularly breeds in the area (Weston 1965a). The Gray Kingbird has been reported in the spring from multiple inland sites in Florida, but breeding has not been confirmed and these birds are likely migrants (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b).

The Gray Kingbird is a short- to medium-distance partial migrant (Smith and Jackson 2002). This species is a permanent resident on Hispaniola and islands east of Hispaniola (Bond 1947a, Raffaele 1989). The populations of Gray Kingbird found from Florida and the Bahamas south to Cuba, and possibly Jamaica, are migratory (Bond 1947a). There are some winter records from Florida (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992a, Stevenson and Anderson 1994b), Jamaica (Bond 1947a, Downer and Sutton 1990), and the Isla de Juventud, in Cuba (Bangs and Zappey 1905, Todd 1916b).

In Florida, the Gray Kingbird has been recorded on occasion as an early spring migrant and has been reported as early as March 16 in the Florida Keys, but stragglers will turn up into June (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b). This species typically arrives later in mid- to late April to early May in the Florida Panhandle (Weston 1965a), Alabama (Imhof 1976), Mississippi (Turcotte and Watts 1999), and also probably in Georgia and South Carolina (Sprunt 1942, Burleigh 1958). During migration in Florida, scattered individuals can occur inland (Sprunt 1954c), but most movement is along the coast, with small groups of 20 individuals observed (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b).

Stragglers in migration move north by late March in Mexico and Central America (Howell and Webb 2010), French Guiana (Tostain *et al.* 1992b), and Suriname (Haverschmidt 1950), late April in Panama (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989); late April to early May in Colombia (Hilty and Brown 1986) and Guyana (Snyder 1966). The Gray Kingbird moves irregularly through Costa Rica in mid- to late March (Stiles and Skutch 1989). This species begins arriving in Jamaica, Cuba, Grand Turk I., and Florida in March (Barbour 1943, Buden 1987b, Downer and Sutton 1990, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992a); mid- to late April in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Wetmore and Swales 1931), the Cayman Islands (Bradley 1985b), the Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975), and the United States north of southern Florida (Imhof 1976, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Turcotte and Watts 1999). The Gray Kingbird moves irregularly throughout Bermuda from March 30 to May 26 (Amos 1991).

Fall migration begins for the Gray Kingbird by mid-September in Mississippi (Turcotte and Watts 1999), Alabama (Imhof 1976), and the Florida Panhandle (Weston 1965a). Further to the south birds move south a bit later in the fall from late September into October in the Florida Keys (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b), Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975), Cuba (Barbour 1943), Jamaica (Downer and Sutton 1990), and Cayman Islands (Bradley 1985b). Stragglers may still be found in Florida in November and December (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b). This species arrives in Mexico and Central America, including Panama and Costa Rica, and in Colombia from September into early November (Hilty and Brown 1986, Ridgely and Gwynne 1989, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Howell and Webb 2010). The Gray Kingbird arrives by October into early November in Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname (Haverschmidt 1950, Snyder 1966, Tostain *et al.* 1992b). Stragglers have been found in Bermuda from September 7–October 26 (Amos 1991).

The Gray Kingbird is probably a diurnal migrant and has been observed traveling in flocks during the day (Brudenell-Bruce 1975) and at dusk (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b). Flocks are typically small, normally under 20 individuals, (Stevenson and Anderson 1994b), sometimes including family groups (Howell 1932, Greene 1946). The Gray Kingbird has been observed migrating with Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) flocks along the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica (Stiles and Skutch 1989). When encountered away from coastal locations, the Gray Kingbird is found inland more often during migration and is a rare straggler throughout interior Florida during migration in a variety of open habitats (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992a, Stevenson and Anderson 1994b).

The Gray Kingbird wintering habitat is similar to the species' breeding habitat, and is mostly confined to lowland tropical zones, but will venture farther inland than during breeding season (Nicholson 1948c, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992a, Stevenson and Anderson 1994b).

The Gray Kingbird winters from Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands east among islands of the Lesser Antilles (Bond 1961a, Raffaele 1989, French 1991a, Raffaele *et al.* 1998) south to Panama where it is found mainly in the lowland areas in central Panama, but has been reported west to eastern Veraguas and east to eastern Darien provinces; Ridgely and Gwynne 1989), western and northern Colombia, south to Valle, Huila, and Meta, with a few reports from Pacific coast at Buenaventura, most of Venezuela, south to northern Amazonas and northern Bolívar), Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and extreme northern Brazil, where reported at Maraca Ecological Station in Roraima (Moscovits *et al.* 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1994); rarely to Yucatán Peninsula and possibly west to Ecuador (Meyer de Schauensee 1966, Hilty and Brown 1986, Ridgely and Gwynne 1989, Rodner *et al.* 2000). The Gray Kingbird is a rare, but regular winter visitor in extreme southern Florida and the Florida Keys; often found farther inland on the mainland than during breeding season (Nicholson 1948c, Stevenson and Anderson 1994b). One specimen was collected 65–80 km inland on the western border of Lake Okeechobee, on January 30, 1945 (Nicholson 1948c). This species is rare on the southern islands of the Bahamas (Paterson 1972, Emlen 1977); Isla de Juventud, Cuba (Bangs and Zappey 1905, Todd 1916b); Jamaica (Bond 1947a, Downer and Sutton 1990); Caribbean islands of Mexico from Quintana Roo to border with Belize (Howell and Webb 2010, Edwards 1998); Honduras (Monroe 1968), Nicaragua, and Panama (Salvin and Godman 1904, Ridgely 1976); and in northern Brazil (Moscovits *et al.* 1985, Sick 1993).

The Gray Kingbird has been found to be a rare, but expected vagrant to Bermuda in the spring (Amos 1991). This species is likely a casual or very rare migrant to Costa Rica, in the months of September and October (Stiles and Skutch 1989). The Gray Kingbird is a casual visitor to the islands off the coasts of Mexico and Belize, and possibly northern Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama (Sprunt 1942, Howell and Webb 2010). This species is an accidental vagrant to the El Oro coast of southwestern Ecuador (Ridgely and Greenfield 2001a).

The Gray Kingbird has occurred as a rare to casual vagrant west from Louisiana (Lowery 1974) to Texas (Goldman 1952, Lasley and Sexton 1992b); north from North Carolina (Fussell III 1994) to Virginia (Smith and Jackson 2002), Maryland (Holmes 1975), Delaware (Hess *et al.* 2000b), New Jersey (Walsh *et al.* 1999b), New York (Sprunt 1942), Pennsylvania (PORC 2017), Connecticut (Zeranski and Baptist 1990), Massachusetts (Veit and Petersen 1993), and Maine (Persons *et al.* 2015). There are also vagrancy records from Arkansas (AAS 2017), Michigan (Granlund *et al.* 1994), Missouri (MOBRC 2017), Indiana (IBRC 2017), Kentucky (KOS 2017), Illinois (Brock 1999, Kassebaum 1999), and southern Wisconsin (American Ornithologists' Union 1998a).

In eastern Canada, there are confirmed records of Gray Kingbird from New Brunswick (Godfrey 1986), Nova Scotia (Tufts 1986), Quebec (QBIRDS 2017), and Ontario (Godfrey 1986).

There are no records of the Gray Kingbird along the west coast of North America from California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017), Oregon (OFO 2016) or Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016). In British Columbia, this is an accidental vagrant species with a single record of an individual collected on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island (Fannin 1898, Macoun and Macoun 1909).

Identification and Similar Species

The Identification of the Gray Kingbird is covered in all standard North American field guides. This is a large tyrant flycatcher species measuring 23 cm in length, a wingspan of 35 cm, and weighs 44 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Gray Kingbird is a typical kingbird in size and shape (Sibley 2000). Adults are gray above, white below, with a gray wash on the breast (Sibley 2000). There is a blackish stripe on the face running from base of the bill to ear coverts (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is large, black, thick at the base, and slightly glossy, flattened, with a wide base and hooked tip (Smith and Jackson 2002). The size of the bill gives the Gray Kingbird a bull-headed effect (Smith and Jackson 2002). The eyes are brown (Junge and Mees 1961) to dark brown (Wetmore and Swales 1931). There are faint whitish wing-bars, and the wing-covert edgings are washed in cinnamon (Smith and Jackson 2002). The tail is conspicuously notched, slaty, without white edges (Sibley 2000). The legs and feet are black (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There are some orange or reddish-orange crown feathers, usually visible only in hand (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989, Evans 1990a, Howell and Webb 2010, Alden *et al.* 1998). Juvenile birds hold their plumage from July to November (Sibley 2000). Overall birds in this plumage look the same as adults, but are browner above (Dunn and Alderfer 2011)

The Gray Kingbird is best distinguished from other kingbirds by the combination of a thick bill, uniformly gray crown and upper-parts, rectrices without white tips, and under-parts without any yellow (Smith and Jackson 2002). The most likely species to cause confusion in British Columbia is the Eastern Kingbird, the Gray Kingbird has distinctly paler upper-parts, a much larger bill, heavier body, shorter wings, and longer tail lacking white terminal band (Smith and Jackson 2002). In bright light, Tropical Kingbird (*T. melancholicus*) that occurs from Arizona south through Middle and South America, and turns up annually along the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, can appear more light-breasted and thus similar to Gray Kingbird (Smith and Jackson 2002). The Gray Kingbird is most often confused with the Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) which shares many similar plumage characteristics, rather than with other kingbirds (Sprunt 1942, Imhof 1976). The Gray Kingbird has a larger bill

and lacks the black wings, black tail, and white markings on the wings characteristic of shrikes (Smith and Jackson 2002).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Gray Kingbird is an accidental vagrant in British Columbia with a single record of an immature bird collected by Miss Cox at Cape Beale, near Barkley Sound on September 29, 1889 (Fannin 1898, Macoun and Macoun 1909). This incredible record is the only record of this species anywhere in western North America (Smith and Jackson 2002). The Gray Kingbird does wander up the east coast of North America on a regular basis and its propensity to head off course is a trait shared by other southern tyrannids (McCaskie *et al.* 1967, Roberson 1980, Smith and Jackson 2002). It is highly unlikely this species will ever turn up in British Columbia again.

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