

A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Yolo and Solano counties -- On 12 December 2003, Sylvia Wright of the University of California, Davis, (hereafter, UC Davis) News Service saw a bird she didn't recognize from her window on the third floor of Mrak Hall. She took a quick snapshot with a digital camera—the bird was sitting high in a magnolia tree, almost at eye level—then watched it fly south-southwest, assuming it had disappeared for good. She sent the photo to Michael Perrone, a member of the Yolo County Checklist Committee (hereafter, YCCC). The sighting and photo proved to be of a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*). Frustrated local birders wrote it off as a one-day wonder, however.

On the morning of 16 January 2004, Sid England, chair of the YCCC, got a phone call from me, two floors below him in Mrak Hall. "The Scissor-tailed's right outside my window," I said. "Meet you outside?"

What I had seen through the window was a mostly gray passerine, about the size of a small thrush, that flew into the large valley oak to the north. When the bird flew toward the window and close up, I saw the salmon wash under the wings; vermilion patch just above the wing joint; the huge triangular bill which showed yellowish-pink at the base, and the long tail which, though by no means the full extraordinary length of adult males, was starting to get a hint of the fork for which the bird is named.

Quickly confirming that the bird was indeed there and feeding on magnolia fruits, Sid and I called a number of local birders including Sylvia, who posted the report to CV Birds. Within twenty minutes a group of about twenty—including Andy Engilis, Jr., and his ornithology class—was at the north side of Mrak Hall with binoculars and spotting scopes. Joan Humphrey, Steve Hampton, Roger Adamson and others spent the weekend trying to discover where the bird went in the afternoons, which turned out to be the UC Davis Wastewater Treatment Plant (hereafter, WWTP), just over the county line in Solano County.

The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was subsequently seen regularly in the mornings feeding on magnolia fruits outside Mrak Hall and then, in the afternoons, once there was some insect activity, flycatching at the WWTP. It was last seen at Mrak Hall on the morning of 14 February; John Sterling reported it on 5 March at 1300 at the WWTP. Searches in the latter location later that week and the following week came up empty.

This bird was seen and enjoyed by many including the UC Davis Chancellor, Provost, and many other administrators who were not birders but were impressed with the bird (and, it has to be said, with the birders). It was also well-documented by photographers (see front and back covers of this issue). John Meyer, Vice Chancellor of Resource Management and Planning, kindly arranged for public access to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. — Alison Kent, Wildlife Health Center, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA 95616.



Figure 1. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) at Mrak Hall, University of California, Davis, Yolo County, on 26 January 2004.

photo by Todd Easterla

Editor's Note: In summarizing the status of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on the Pacific Coast, Roberson (1980, *Rare Birds of the West Coast*, Woodstock Publ., Pacific Grove, CA) wrote that "spring and fall vagrants comprise the bulk of the records, but wintering birds and mid-summer stragglers occur as well." The handful of records for the Central Valley fit well into this pattern of seasonally-dispersed occurrence. Aside from the summer and winter records described above, other Central Valley records are of one seen at Colusa National Wildlife Refuge, Colusa County, on 18 October 1970, one near Clovis, Fresno County, on 8 July 1978, and one at Cerro Noroeste, Kern County, on 6 Sept 1992 (California Bird Records Committee files, *fide* David Yee). Roberson (*loc. cit.*) also cites a previous California nesting attempt involving a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, apparently a female, paired with a Western Kingbird, along the Colorado River at Needles, San Bernardino County, in 1979. A nest was built and eggs laid, but these were subsequently abandoned. — T.M.