

First record of Vermilion Flycatchers in Kings County

Luke W. Cole, 561 Hill Street, San Francisco, CA 94114, luke@igc.org

Mark Stacy 774 Basil Court, Lemoore, CA 93245

Christy Uhor 774 Basil Court, Lemoore, CA 93245

On 13 January 2001, Uhor and Stacy found two Vermilion Flycatchers (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) on the property of the Lemoore Sportsman's Club, north of Elgin Avenue in northern Kings County. We saw the male first and had no trouble identifying him. Brilliant red with a dark mask and upper parts, he spent his time catching insects over a shallow pond and perching in plain sight for minutes at a time. The female didn't materialize until after we had gotten our fill of the male and begun to move on. We found her about 40 yards away. Once again, identification was straightforward. A dark mask, white throat and eye-brow, and pinkish belly were her most prominent features. These two birds are the first known records of this species for Kings County.

Vermilion Flycatchers forage at medium to low heights (Grinnell and Miller 1944), and these two birds were consistently found within 4-10 feet of the ground during their stay. Interestingly, Grinnell and Miller (1944) note that many of the historical extralimital records of Vermilion Flycatcher in the West were associated with bottomland tracts of willows – the habitat they occupied in Kings County.

After Uhor and Stacy's original sighting, the birds were present on an almost-daily basis for six weeks. They were often observed in the vicinity of each other, but did not seem to interact. The female was last seen on 29 February, and the male last seen on 11 March 2001. The male was seen on 26 February about 1 mile north of this site, less than ½ mile from the Fresno County line (Cole, pers. obs.).

STATUS AND RANGE

The Vermilion Flycatcher is resident in California along the lower Colorado River, and a rare but regular and extremely local breeder elsewhere in Southern California, notably at Big Morongo in San Bernardino County (Small 1994, Garrett and Dunn 1981, Grinnell and Miller 1944). It was considered a "fairly common" breeder in the Colorado Desert at one time (Grinnell and Miller 1944), but habitat loss has led to the species' decline there (Small 1994). It was formerly a more widespread breeder in the interior of Southern California and as far as coastal San Diego County (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Grinnell and Miller (1944) note that it had been found in "territory outside its breeding range, though in about same latitude" in coastal California during fall, winter and spring. Its northward explorations are a more recently reported phenomenon. With the exception of several records in Inyo County, the first northern California (and

Central Valley) record was a bird in Fresno in 1955 (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1988). The bird has been found in summer (1977) near the southern San Joaquin Valley at Frazier Park, Kern County (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Table 1. Records of Vermilion Flycatcher from the Central Valley.

Sex (age if reported)	Location (county)	Date(s)	Source
male	“near Fresno” (Fresno)	12/27/55	McCaskie et al. 1988
male	Thornton (San Joaquin)	1/13-14/64 (photo)	McCaskie et al. 1988
male	Clovis (Fresno)	4/16-17/81	McCaskie et al. 1988; North American Birds files*
male	Creighton Ranch (Tulare)	11/1/81	McCaskie et al. 1988; North American Birds files*
female (immature)	Bates Slough (Tulare)	12/30/91	Yee et al., 1992a
males (2, adult)	Gray Lodge Wildlife Area (Butte)	1/26-3/1/92 with 2 nd male after 2/17/92	Yee et al., 1992b
male and female	Lucky Seven Duck Club (Sutter)**	“December” 1992 through 1/30/93	Yee et al., 1993
male	Lincoln (Placer)	12/21/92-1/3/93	Sacramento Bird Records Committee files
male	San Luis N.W.R. (Merced)	12/10/98	Terrill, et al., 1999
male and female	Lemoore Sportsman’s Club (Kings)	1/13-2/29/01 (female), 1/13-3/11/01 (male)	Glover, et al. 2001; pers. obs.

* S. Glover, pers. comm.).

**These birds were reported incorrectly in American Birds as in Butte County (T. Manolis, pers. comm.).

CENTRAL VALLEY RECORDS

Vermilion Flycatchers have been observed as rare winter and spring visitors to the Central Valley. A large majority of the records range from December through February (Table 1), and a number of them involve birds that appear to have wintered successfully. In addition to the records in Table 1, there is an old specimen with no date from near Clovis, Fresno County (McCaskie et al. 1988), and there are two reports from Sacramento County (for September 1978 and September 1983) that await full evaluation by the Sacramento Bird Records Committee (T. Manolis, pers. comm.). There was also an adult male reported to *American Birds* from Faith Ranch (Stanislaus County) on December 31, 1987 with no details (S. Glover, pers. comm.).

We had hoped that the two flycatchers in Kings County might stick around and breed, thus establishing the first Valley breeding record. The northernmost, and closest, Vermilion Flycatcher nesting records for California are in Ridgecrest, where breeding was confirmed in 1992, and more recently at California City (G. McCaskie, pers. comm., Small 1994, Heindel 2000). Both of these locations are in extreme northeastern Kern County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Bruce Deuel, Steve Glover, Tim Manolis and Joe Morlan for information on various sight records, and Guy McCaskie for information on Kern County breeding records.

LITERATURE CITED

Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. *Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution*.

Glover, S. A., S. B. Terrill, D. S. Singer, and D. Roberson. 2001. *Middle Pacific Coast*. *North American Birds* 55:223.

Grinnell, J., and A. Miller. 1944. *Distribution of the Birds of California*. *Pacific Coast Avifauna* No. 27.

Heindel, M. 2000. *Birds of Eastern Kern County*. (<http://fog.ccsf.org/~jmorlan/eastkern.pdf>).

McCaskie, G., P. DeBenedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1988. *Birds of Northern California, An Annotated Field List* (2d edition).

Small, A. 1994. *California Birds: Their Status and Distribution*. Ibis Publishing Company.

Terrill, S. B., S. C. Rottenborn, D. S. Singer, and D. Roberson. 1999. Middle Pacific Coast Region. *North American Birds* 53:203.

Yee, D. G., S. F. Bailey, and B. E. Deuel. 1992a. Middle Pacific Coast Region. *American Birds* 46:312.

Yee, D. G., S. F. Bailey, and B. E. Deuel. 1992b. Middle Pacific Coast Region. *American Birds* 46:477.

Yee, D. G., S. F. Bailey, and B. E. Deuel. 1993. Middle Pacific Coast Region. *American Birds* 47:298.