

# Illinois' "First" Reported Scissor-tailed Flycatcher Nest

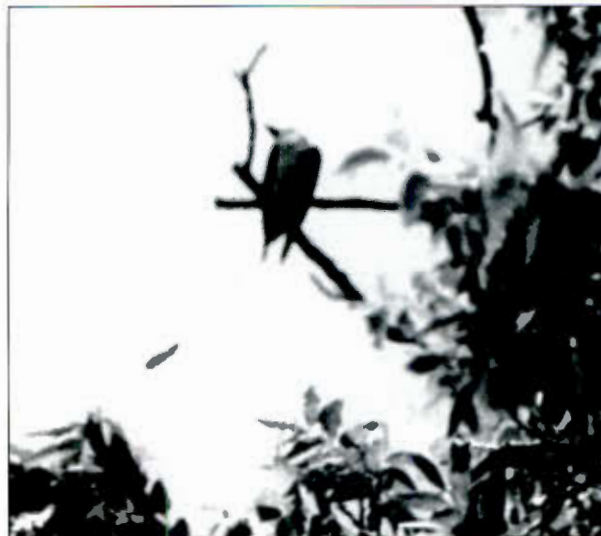
by Steven D. Bailey

It is not often today that an individual has the opportunity to discover an ornithological "first" in Illinois or elsewhere in North America, especially a first nesting record. I could have laid claim to the state's first Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) nest in late April of 1993, while conducting breeding bird research in Union County, Illinois. A Fish Crow was building a nest about 40 feet up in a tall, spindly ash (*Fraxinus sp.*) tree along the Union County Refuge dike road on the east side of Clear Creek Ditch. However, in mid-April of 1992, John Schwegman had already found a pair of Fish Crows building a nest in Massac County. (see Kleen and Schwegman 1993), a year before.

Then with the extreme flooding of the Mississippi River all up and down its length in 1993, Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*) began occurring in unprecedented numbers far north of their known breeding range, including Illinois, and even in pairs. The search was on to see who could find Illinois's first stilt nest. Again, while conducting research during the summers of 1993 and 1994 in Union County, I observed numbers of Black-necked Stilts including an incredible 11 birds at three locations in June 1993 (see Fink 1994). In June 1994, however, it was Cynthia McKee who discovered the first Illinois nests for this species in Jackson and Mason Counties (see McKee and Fink 1995). Foiled again!

Of course that meant that my luck would probably soon change, and it did with my finding of the state's third nest (two pairs of adults with one nest with four eggs in a flooded wheat field) near Gale (Alexander Co.) in June of 1995 (previously unpublished data). This nest was built atop a mound of soil between two tractor tire tracks, less than six feet from a county road.

Now skip to the spring of 2001. At the tally for the Union County spring bird count on 5 May, Vernon Kleen announced his best bird of the day, a male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) along the Mississippi River levee road due west of the Union County Refuge. I went looking for the bird since it would be a county lifer. Although others saw it before



**Figure 1.** A male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher sits in a pecan tree where it nested the summer of 2001. Photo taken 29 May 2001 in Union County by Steven D. Bailey.

I arrived, rain thwarted my attempts to see the bird that day. However, between that time and when I was to return to the area later that month, Kleen told me a second bird, a female Scissor-tailed, had been seen by Rhonda Monroe and others on 12 May. I asked if a nest had been found, but no one had found one.

So I decided to look for a nest on the afternoon of 29 May. The actual nest location was just off the east side of the gravel/dirt Mississippi River Levee Road (615-635E), roughly 0.5 mile south of its intersection with Follis Road (635N). Upon arrival at the large, lone pecan tree (*Carya illinoensis*) where the bird had originally been seen by Kleen on 5 May, I quickly located the male flycatcher sitting near the top of the tree. The only other trees in the area were a few small dogwood (*Cornus sp.*), honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), and box elder (*Acer negundo*) saplings, growing at the base of the pecan, just across the dike road in the bottomland forest flooded by high water from the Mississippi River, and a thin