

AVIAN ARCHIVES

New Early Records of the Western Kingbird in Illinois

by C.T. (Ted) Black

The Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) occurred and nested in Illinois much earlier than current records (Bohlen 1989) indicate. Between 1935 and 1937 and somewhat later, when I was working with Professor Alvin R. Cahn of the University of Illinois on a proposed Birds of Illinois book, we recorded the following unpublished information:

First Illinois Record:

In a letter to Cahn, Harry C. Oberholser, Senior Ornithologist, U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey, Washington, D. C., stated that on 29 August 1903, the Bureau received in the mail the head and wing of a bird from Chicago, Illinois, with a request for its identity. The bird was identified as an Arkansas (now Western) Kingbird. Oberholser was one of the most respected ornithologists of his day. This pre-dates by 21 years the 2 June 1924 current (Coale 1924) first Illinois record.

First Illinois Nest:

In a 31 August 1938 letter to me, Muriel Lampert of Belvidere, Illinois, reported that on 18 July 1929, she observed a pair of Arkansas (now Western) Kingbirds and their nest, and on 29 July the pair with four immature birds, near Belvidere in Boone County. This pre-dates by 36 years the 9 June 9 1965, current (Graber et al 1974) first Illinois nest.

Lampert stated: "Arkansas Kingbird--identified first a pair and nest 18 July, 1929; male and female with immature birds, 29 July, 1929. My recollection is there were four young...The nest was placed high in one of a long row of young elm trees near a young orchard--with open fields on three sides of the premises of the Boone County farm about 2 miles north of Belvidere on Route 76. The following year--1930--a pair of birds was observed at the same location on June 29 and 30. But I have no record of nesting. In 1932, at the same place a pair of birds was observed on May 15, 16, 31, and on June 5 and 7. I am quite sure that nesting was again reported to me--the young coming off successfully--but I made no personal observation and consequently have no dates. The next year, 1933, one bird was seen again at the same place and reported to me, but only once, in late May. And they have not since been seen there (nor anywhere else near here that I know of)."

Muriel Lampert was an active, experienced, and careful birder. She was a court reporter, and very methodical in recording her bird observations.

There have now been at least nine Western Kingbird nestings in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). Graber et al (1974) note that "June and July records of the Western Kingbird in or very near northeastern Illinois in 1924, 1935, and 1938...may have been indicative of nesting in those early years." The Lampert record would seem to confirm this, and it is reasonable that it be accepted.