

The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Illinois with accounts of nesting attempts in 2003 and 2004

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Introduction

At least 105 reports of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (*Tyrannus forficatus*) in Illinois have been recorded since the first observation near Peoria in 1885. These reports have occurred during most months of the year with the earliest arrivals found in mid-April and typical departures by the end of October. The earliest Illinois spring arrival is of a male found by Frank Bennett on 14 April 2002 at the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Pulaski County (Clyne 2003). Doug Robinson found a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher during a Union County CBC on 29 December 1988, which constitutes the latest record for the state (Robinson 1996). Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been found in at least 48 of the 102 counties in Illinois (see Figure 1), and though this species has been a regular visitor to Illinois for many years, it has only recently been confirmed as part of Illinois' nesting avifauna. To date, there are only SIX confirmed nesting records: Breeding Bird Survey Route

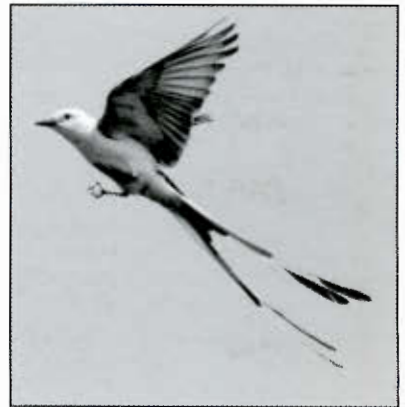
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher photos taken by Eric Walters in 2004.

34-060 in Randolph County, 2000 (Kleen et al. 2001); Mississippi River Levee in Union County, 2001 (Bailey 2002); Tower Island Chute in Jackson County, 2003; Big Muddy River on the Jackson and Union County line, 2004; and near the town of Lenzburg in St. Clair County – 2004. Only THREE of these nesting attempts have been successful with the Randolph County pair and the 2003 Jackson County pair fledging two young each. In addition, Eric Walters found a nest, likely the second nesting of the failed first nest along the Big Muddy River on the Jackson/Union County line in 2004. The local landlord near the site said he saw a family group later that summer (pers. comm. Eric Walters, fide S. DeVore).

These nesting records have a similar pattern of occurrence in that they are all close to the Mississippi River or one of its main tributaries, namely the Big Muddy River and the Kaskaskia River. Several historical observations follow this same geographical trend, which implies that Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have probably been nesting in Illinois for quite some time. During the nesting season of 1968, a male Scissor-tailed Fly-



catcher was observed along the Mississippi River Levee in Monroe County on 26 May (Comfort 1968a); a female was observed nearby on 6 June (Comfort 1968b). This pair likely nested, but published data have no details of such an occurrence. Prior to the first confirmed nesting record in Randolph County the summer of 2000, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher had been observed along the same BBS route on 3 June 1995 (Johnson 1998). Another report of a single flycatcher



during the spring of 2001 was within a couple miles of the 2000 nest site (Kleen et al. 2001). The presence of a pair during May of 2002 along Brink Road in Clinton County was suggestive of a nesting attempt, but unfortunately, one of the birds succumbed to traffic (Joe Smothers - pers. comm.). This 2002 record was the third consecutive year that Scissor-tailed Flycatchers had been observed along Brink Road. A few miles west of this location, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was observed in Eldon Hazlet State Park by the park staff during the summer of 1998.

Several immature Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been noted in Illinois, which is suggestive of local breeding. The oldest report of an immature was on 25 July 1970 between the towns of Cobden and