

Dan observed a second juvenile at the same location on 13 July 2003. This would be the last day that Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were seen at this particular location; however, Craig Litteken spotted a solitary bird within three miles of this spot on 16 July 2003. The sighting took place less than a mile east of Route 3 along Howardton Road (500 N) on the south end of Oakwood Bottoms in Jackson County. The brevity of the sighting prevented identification to age or sex.

Jackson and Union Counties - 2004

In hopes of finding a rare wader or some other summer-time rarity, Dan Kassebaum and I made a trip to several southern Illinois counties on 5 June 2004. One of our target species was the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. We thought that our chances of finding one, or even a nesting pair, were good because Andrew Spencer found one at the Big Muddy River along the county lines of Union and Jackson on 1 May 2004. This location is immediately south of the Tower Island Chute where we confirmed successful nesting during 2003. We maintained an active search image for Scissor-tailed Flycatchers while driving north along Route 3 near the Big Muddy River and the Tower Island Chute.

As we were passing by Lower Chute Road in Jackson County, Dan spotted a pale bird harassing a crow (*Corvus sp.*). I found a place to turn around and quickly drove into Lower Chute Road. Within a few seconds, we found the bird sitting in the middle of the road and identified it as a female Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. It was flushed by a passing van shortly after we found it. We watched it fly for approximately a mile south toward the Big Muddy River until the distant speck was too small to see. Anticipating the location to which it had flown, we drove to the northern levee road (Island Road) along the north shore of the Big Muddy. After a short drive along the levee road, a scan of the nearby trees and vegetation yielded a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher perched in the middle of an eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*). The bird seemed to have a longer tail than the female we had seen earlier. When



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Union County. 18 June 2004. Photo by Travis A. Mahan.

it flew from the tree, it was obvious that this bird was a male. The male flew to a fallow agricultural field to the north of the levee road, which is where we relocated the female. Both were observed flycatching from short perches atop weeds in this low, weedy field.

Given that we confirmed the presence of a pair, we decided to watch their actions to hopefully find evidence of nesting. An isolated clump of small trees at the border of this fallow field was a good candidate for a nest site given that the birds were spending quite a bit of time feeding in this area. The male was observed to perform a series of aerial somersaults along a horizontal plane near this group of trees. After this display, the male flew to a large pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) south of Island Road that was likely on the Union County side of the river. We had since lost sight of the female, so we decided to follow the male in hopes that he would lead us to a nest. We drove west along the southern levee road on the Union County side and found the male still perched high atop the pecan. Within minutes, the male flew to a nearby cottonwood. He would eventually make several short flights to a few of the tallest trees in the area, but returned to this tall and ragged cottonwood on a perch close to the center trunk that was obscured by foliage. The cottonwood was approximately 0.7 mile west of Route 3 and north of the southern levee road. From our viewpoint on the levee, Dan and I got out our spotting scopes to inspect the male's perch. Dan quickly located a modest nest just below the male,

then, seemingly out of nowhere, the female landed in the tree and sat in the nest. The nest appeared to be a loose cup of grasses and weeds situated on a horizontal branch on the eastern side of the tree. The distance from our observation point on the southern levee road to the nest prevented detailed looks to determine the composition of the nest materials. Upon further scanning of the cottonwood, an Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) nest was found within a few feet of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher nest. We were surprised by this discovery given the very aggressive behavior typically exhibited by the *Tyrannus* genus when defending territories and nest sites. No interspecific interactions were noted between the two pairs during our period of observation. In fact, we observed the females of both species sitting on their respective nests at the same time. I'm certain that any potential predator that wandered near this tree was penalized severely.

During this time of the year, the Big Muddy River was at flood stage, so most of the trees were standing in deep water including the nest tree and the willows (*Salix sp.*) at the lower edges of the levee roads. This made guesswork of the county line designations and tree heights, but we estimated the nests to be about 50 ft above the surface of the water. On several occasions, the female was observed to feed among some of the flooded vegetation along the river and was seen perched near ground-level on logs deposited from flood water. She was also noted to visit a particular group of dead trees directly in front of us appearing to collect small insects, which she then returned to her nest. Her behavior suggested that she was feeding young, but we were unable to see the heads of hungry chicks to confirm this possibility. The pair remained in the immediate area of the nest site for the remainder of the afternoon. We never viewed the Scissor-tails on the east side of Route 3 during our stay, though our initial sighting was approximately a mile to the north of the nest site.

The nest site was believed to be in Union County given that the cottonwood appeared to be on the south side of the main river channel. If this were