

the material into the nest structure, she would sit in the nest apparently forming the inside cup. On the occasions that the female flew to the nest, the male would soon follow and perch conspicuously on a high branch. Several of these flights were dangerously low over the highway. During the three hours that we observed the pair, they spent most of their time feeding and gathering nest material in the overgrown field on the north side of Route 13.

Quite a few birders were able to observe these birds, especially St. Louis area residents. The last known observation of the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers from this location took place on 26 June 2004. Ultimately, this nesting attempt failed. Observers noted that the pair was being harassed by European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) on 25 June 2004. Dan Kassebaum checked the area on 27 June 2004 and found a large group of Common Grackles roosting in the nest tree; furthermore, the pair of flycatchers was missing, and the nest was gone. Apparently, the nest succumbed to predation, and the pair moved on to a new location. No other Scissor-tailed Flycatcher reports would come from this area during the remainder of 2004.

Conclusion

Illinois has had a steady flow of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher reports over the past 120 years with reports continually on the rise. The year 2004 was exceptional for Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in Illinois; there were three confirmed nesting attempts and eight additional sightings away from these nest sites. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have nested or attempted to nest in Illinois during four of the past five years. More nesting attempts will certainly be documented in the future, but unfortunately, birding activity is low in many areas of the state where this species is most likely to nest.

All known records for the counties that have confirmed nesting attempts (Jackson, Randolph, St. Clair, and Union) have been listed in Table 1. The records from Clinton and Monroe Counties have also been included in the table since observations suggest that nesting has likely occurred within their borders. Immediately noticeable

in the table are the recurring sightings in similar habitat and at specific sites. The number of sightings within the Mississippi River floodplain is significant as it indicates a long-term presence of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in the region since at least the late 1960s. The observation of a pair in Monroe County during the summer of 1968 with many more subsequent sightings along the bottomlands of the Mississippi River present the possibility that Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been nesting in Illinois for much longer than recorded.

Some reports of Scissor-tails in southern Illinois during late spring and early summer have precluded nesting attempts, and in a few of those cases, nesting was not observed until several years later. Prior to the nesting records of 2003 and 2004 near the Big Muddy River, a female had been photographed by Terry McNeely and Steve Kinder at the river on 24 April

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- 1999 (Clyne 2000). This situation is very similar to that observed in Randolph County when a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was found during the summer of 1995 close to where a pair nested in 2000. Clutch initiation has been found to be strongly correlated to the spring arrival of females at the nesting grounds (Regosin and Pruett-Jones 1995), so from late April through the breeding season, observers should carefully examine the behaviors and movements of any female found in suitable habitat because there may be evidence of nesting.
- The site fidelity exhibited by this species will probably play an important role in the discovery of future nesting attempts. Checking areas that have had previous nesting activity may yield interesting results. Will the pair return for another nesting attempt near Lenzburg? Will the Big Muddy River pair be successful in 2005? There's only one way to find out.
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Editor's Note: As this issue goes to press, a Spring Bird Count tally of a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher from The Nature Conservancy's Grassy Slough Preserve in Johnson County was reported by Illinois Natural History Survey ornithologist, David Enstrom, Ph.D. This record brings to 49 the number of counties where this species has been found in Illinois.