

# Torn between two birds: Photographer must choose between two rarities in DeKalb County

by Mary Kay Rubey

In October 2004, a friend e-mailed me to let me know that Darryl Shambaugh had reported a first-year male Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*), which had been spotted sometime in mid-October by Jason Fry in Afton Forest Preserve, DeKalb County. I photograph that species fairly regularly in Texas, but because Afton Forest Preserve is only an hour from my office, I thought I'd check out the bird.

On 21 October 2004, I loaded my 600mm lens and my Canon 1D Mark II digital camera into the car and left for Afton Forest Preserve, which is on the south side of DeKalb, not far off Route 23. The preserve consists of mostly grasslands, with a small lake and a creek. When I arrived, I immediately happened upon a birder who was about

to depart. He pointed me in the direction of the Vermilion Flycatcher. I thanked him and headed across the mowed picnic area to the edge of the little lake. It took about 15 minutes to locate the flycatcher the first time. Each time the bird darted off for an insect, it took another 10 or 15 minutes to find him again. I spent about an hour

...I found and lost the bird more times than I care to count and most of my time was spent showing each arriving party of birders where the flycatcher preferred to hang out.



*Vermilion Flycatcher: Afton Forest Preserve, DeKalb County. 24 October 2004. Photos by Mary Kay Rubey.*



photographing the bird. The light was fading, and I had not gotten any photos I really liked. What was the chance that the bird would stick around very long? It was already late October.

Two days later, I had another gap in my schedule, and I knew from the IBET posts that the bird was still around. So I headed to Afton again. My second visit was at midday, which is not the best time for bird photography. A number of birders were looking for the flycatcher when I arrived. During the 90 min-