

utes at Afton, 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. I was also getting better photos as I became more familiar with this particular bird's behavior.

When a photographer friend of mine, Tom Robbins, who lives in DeKalb, expressed an interest in getting together to photograph the Vermilion Flycatcher the following day, I thought I'd make one last attempt at photographing the bird. Tom and I arrived very early and were joined by one other person as we began our search. After finding and losing the bird several times, a pattern to which I'd already become far too accustomed, we had a prolonged period during which we hadn't been able to locate the bird.

Suddenly, I heard Tom call out that he had the Vermilion Flycatcher. He pointed toward a row of red bushes at the northwest edge of the mowed picnic area. It was hard to pick out a red bird amid the tangle of red branches and leaves. Tom and I were both using the same camera equipment, a 600mm lens with 2x teleconverter attached to a digital camera body that had a 1.3x multiplication factor. So we essentially were shooting with the equivalent of 1560mm worth of focal length, giving us a very narrow field of vision. It's not unusual to have to search a bit to find a bird and then get it in focus.

Then something feathered appeared in my viewfinder. As I brought the bird into focus, I shouted, "Say's Phoebe." (*Sayornis saya*). Tom said, "Huh?" I repeated myself, knowing that Tom was familiar with only local birds. He said, "I'm looking at the Vermilion Flycatcher." I said, "Tom, that is a Say's Phoebe. It's not the same bird that we've been chasing all morning." Tom, knowing full well that he was indeed, looking at the flycatcher,

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*Say's Phoebe. Afton Forest Preserve,
DeKalb County. 24 October 2004
Photo by Mary Kay Rubey.*

very politely insisted that he had the Vermilion Flycatcher in his lens. At nearly the same moment, Tom and I both took our eyes away from our camera viewfinders to see that on Tom's side of the bush was the Vermilion Flycatcher, and on my side of the bush, just inches away, was a Say's Phoebe. Tom immediately shifted his focus to the phoebe. After a minute, we both looked at each other to be sure that the other person was satisfied that he or she had what we call "safety shots," photos that are taken from a safe distance not likely to disturb the bird. I asked, "Ready to move up?" Tom nodded. We were just about to advance slowly on the two birds

when the Say's Phoebe headed north into a field with tall grass and the Vermilion Flycatcher headed south to the far end of the mowed picnic area.

Both species are casual in Illinois, meaning they are species for which there are accepted records in three to seven of the past 10 years. Both are common flycatchers of the western United States.

Tom and the other birder immediately headed after the flycatcher without any hesitation. However, I—knowing that the Vermilion Flycatcher had been around for quite some time and would therefore probably be easy to find once again—wanted to head after our new discovery. I didn't want the Say's Phoebe to slip away. Neither Tom nor the other birder was interested in following the phoebe. So I reluctantly followed them as they pursued the Vermilion Flycatcher yet again. (This bird was present through at least 8 November 2004.)

Unfortunately, that was the last time anyone laid eyes on that Say's Phoebe at Afton.

Although a number of good birders were present that morning, none of them had seen the phoebe. When my friend Pete Olson arrived, we told him about the Say's Phoebe. He diligently searched the north end of Afton, but had no luck finding the bird. I returned a week later to take some final pictures of the Vermilion Flycatcher at Afton, wishing I had followed my instincts about pursuing the phoebe. Alas, I still have no good photos of a Say's Phoebe. But who would have ever expected to be torn between two very rare birds in the same bush at the same time?

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