

# LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <[zoiseaux@lusfiber.net](mailto:zoiseaux@lusfiber.net)> .

1. English and Scientific names: Couch's Kingbird, *Tyrannus couchii*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): 1 individual; sex unknown; adult plumage

3. Parish: Natchitoches

Specific Locality: 31 52 52.70 N, 93 11 16.95 W

When seen initially, the bird was perched on utility wires on the north side of the road, approximately 60 meters southwest of the Rodney Baker residence at 937 Smith Island Road, Natchitoches (the closest actual town is Powhatan, approximately .75 miles to the southwest of the location) 71457. The bird exhibited typical flycatcher behavior in making short flights, and then returning to either the initial perch or along the same wires as far as approximately 180 meters southwest of the Baker residence.

4. Date(s) when observed: 1/4/20

5. Time(s) of day when observed: from 1:45 until 2:20 p.m.

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Matt Courtman
City: Ruston
State: Louisiana 71270

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): Hubert Hervey

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): Visually, Hubert and I identified the bird collaboratively as EITHER a Couch's or a Tropical Kingbird. Hubert had a better look at the tail initially and immediately eliminated Western Kingbird because of the lack of white outer tail feathers. As soon as I got a good look, I too concluded that there were no white outer tail feathers. [I later learned that some Westerns don't have white outer tail feathers in the winter. The bright yellow extended way too high to be a Western.] Through consulting different sources, we both independently came

to the conclusion that the bird LOOKED like a Couch's, rather than a Tropical Kingbird: I favored Couch's because of the greener back and less deeply forked tail: Hubert focused on the greener back as well, but also liked Tropical for some difference in wing projection found in his National Geographic Field Guide. Despite our leanings, we both concluded that, absent a vocalization, we couldn't responsibly identify the bird as being a Couch's and not a Tropical Kingbird. After getting excellent looks at the bird for approximately six minutes, the bird called, and we both independently said "Couch's!"

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): The bird was fully illuminated by bright, mid-day sunshine. There were no issues of the bird being back-lit or in shadows. Also, the bird was fairly tame. We were able to walk around, and observe it from several different angles.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss 8 x 40 binoculars in excellent condition.

11. Distance to bird(s): Mostly the bird was on a wire that was approximately 20 feet in the air. Laterally, my distance from the bird ranged from 5 to 15 meters.

12. Duration of observation: 25 minutes.

13. Habitat: open field near a former oxbow of the Red River.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

Hubert and I were driving north and east along unpaved Smith Road as part of the Natchitoches Christmas Bird Count. Hubert was driving. He stopped the car, and said "Hey, what do we have here on the wire?" From the passenger side I couldn't see much of the bird other than to observe that it was a yellow-bellied and greenish/grayish backed kingbird. My immediate reaction was "Western Kingbird." Hubert then corrected me and said "Look at the tail...no white." Upon exiting the car, I also was able to see the tail well enough to conclude that it had no white outer tail feathers, and was not deeply forked, which started me on thinking Couch's right away. The bird was perched on a wire about eight meters from the road. It allowed us to move within five meters from it. From this first location it engaged in typical flycatcher behavior of flying from its perch for a few seconds to attempt feeding, and then returning to the same spot. We were able to see the bird in flight and from both the front and rear. After approximately ten minutes, the bird repositioned itself approximately 20 meters to the southwest, but still perched upon the same wire. After engaging in the same "flycatching" behavior of making several brief sorties and returning to the same perch, the bird called for the first time. It was in flight, and emitted three sharp "kips!" To confirm my vocal identification of Couch's, I then played my Sibley's app of the Couch's, and the bird immediately responded with four more "kips," which sounded EXACTLY like the Sibley app call for the Couch's. For comparison, I played the Tropical calls which were all too thin and shrill to sound like the

call that the subject bird made. The subject bird did not respond to the Tropical calls. I did not play any more sounds for fear of stressing the bird. For the next ten minutes the bird continued this flycatching behavior from this more southwestern perch on the wire, with a brief sojourn to a nearby Sweet Gum tree. The bird called approximately fifteen more times from this area. Each time the sound was the same robust “kip!” The bird then returned to the same place where we had seen it been initially, a spot on the wire 20 meters to the northeast. After perching there for approximately five minutes, the bird flew out of sight in an easterly direction on the north side of Smith Road.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*):

A chunky, brownish-green backed bird with bright yellow underparts which was about the size of an Eastern Bluebird. The green of the back contrasted with the gray of the head. The throat of the bird was white. There was a darker gray spot behind the eye, with a much darker gray line that ran from the black eye to the black bill. The face and throat of the bird was white or a much lighter gray than the rest of the head. The bill was fairly thick and about a third as long as the width of the head. Depending on the orientation of the bird, the tail was either slightly notched or rounded. The legs and feet were dark. It flew with shallow wingbeats.

16. Voice:

A whistled, emphatic “KIP!” repeated at least three times in each series

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Western Kingbird---eliminated by: lack of white outer tail feathers: much thicker and substantial bill; and, the fact that the breast was yellow all the way up to the throat instead of having a gray breast

Cassin’s Kingbird---eliminated by how extensive the light area was on the throat and face of the bird as opposed to just a small spot of white just below the Cassin’s eye.

Tropical Kingbird---eliminated by voice; rather than the thin trill of the Tropical, the call of the subject bird was an emphatic, whistled “KIP!” with more space between the notes than the Tropical which sounds more slurred together to me.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): I made some photos with my cell phone which are attached.

19. Previous experience with this species: I have seen and heard this species approximately forty times on three trips to the Rio Grande Valley over the years. As a former president of the Louisiana Ornithological Society, I have twice encountered “Tropical/Couch’s Kingbirds?” near Cameron during Spring LOS meeting weekends. On neither occasion, however, did the subject birds call, so I couldn’t be sure of the

identification.

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America; Cornell's website; Sibley's Phone App; and, consultation with another very experienced birder, Hubert Hervey

b. after observation: Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America

21. This description is written from:

<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	memory		
<input type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:  
I am positive of the identification.

23. Date: 1/8/2020  
Time: 4:58 p.m.

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

\_\_\_\_\_yes\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, may we include your name with the report? \_\_\_\_\_yes\_\_\_\_\_

4:35 cricket



4:34 cricket



4:37 cricket

