

LBRC Report Form

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 presumed adult
3. Parish:
Plaquemines
4. Specific Locality:
Cypress Cove Marina, Venice
5. Date(s) when observed: 12/10/23
6. Time(s) of day when observed: around noon
7. Reporting observer: Esme Rosen
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):
Couch's Kingbirds were reported in Diamond earlier in the year, but I am not aware that anyone else has seen them in Venice, and I do not know if they are the same bird
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):
Excellent lighting at close range
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss binoculars
12. Distance to bird(s): 2-3 meters
13. Duration of observation: 20 minutes
14. Habitat: An open field surrounded by fencing adjacent to the landfill to the west and the lower Mississippi river to the east, with a small woodlot that the kingbirds used a bit removed from the road
15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Flying around field, landing frequently and attempting to catch insects - initially rather distant in scrub, but moved closer along wire. Responded aggressively to Couch's playback, which is what I played mostly. I was initially somewhat confused, since I originally thought there was one bird responding aggressively to the playback of both species; however, there turned out to be two birds, and it became apparent that this bird

responded better to Couch's, and the other to Tropical. Since I heard the Tropical fairly early on, I focused on Couch's playback

16. 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):

Kingbird, longer-billed than Western, but shorter than Tropical, with a thick based bill. Bright yellow below, with contrasting white throat, slightly worn on upper chest, but still more extensive and brighter yellow than the adjacent Tropical. Head grey, with black mask. Wings grey and pale edged, except primaries, which had minimal pale edging and where notably blacker. Tail black, and slightly less forked.

17. Voice: I thought I heard a Couch's right after I first saw the initial bird, but I then heard a definite Tropical and began to doubt myself. I never heard the Couch's again, so I am not entirely positive that I heard it, though I suspect I did

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

The main similar species is Tropical Kingbird. Besides voice, there is a suite of subtle visual characteristics that can be useful for separating the species in most cases, introduced by Cin-Ty Lee. It is the combination of these features that make me confident calling this a Couch's. It is also notable that I had this bird within 2 meters of a confirmed (by voice) Tropical Kingbird, and could compare the different features, which were notably different. There are three main points. (1) The best known mark separating the two is the bill shape. This bird had a very short bill, slightly shorter than even the Tropical here, which was a somewhat short-billed individual. The bill was also distinctly thicker-based than the Tropical, which may be even more useful, given the variation in bill length in Tropicals. (2) Besides this, the coloration of the breast was brighter yellow on the Couch's than the Tropical; the Tropical had almost a greenish color once you reached the breast, whereas the Couch's was brighter, though still a little faded due to wear. The color of the belly also appeared slightly brighter on the Couch's in the field, though this is hard to quantify in the photos. The brighter yellow chest gave the white throat a more contrasting appearance than the other bird. (3) Cin-Ty Lee also notes the primaries as a fairly reliable difference between the species, a trend I also observed in Texas and in photos I studied online. In general, Couch's should have blacker contrasting primaries with minimal white edges, whereas Tropical should have primaries that are grayer and have wider pale edges, in a more uniform appearance with the secondaries/tertiaries. This difference was conspicuous on these two birds. The Couch's had faint pale edges to the primaries, but there were much thinner than on the other wing feathers, not even noticeable at a distance, and were a contrasting darker black than the other feathers. The primaries were similarly worn to the other wing feathers, so this is an actual difference, not caused by molt. Moreover, this trait was visible in a variety of positions and different lightings, several of which are shown in the series of photos. In addition to the three traits above, another supporting feature is that the Couch's had a less forked tail than the adjacent Tropical. This is less reliable than the other three, but is still suggestive.

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):

A series of a dozen photographs is attached in various lighting and positions

20. Previous experience with this species: As previously noted, a good amount of experience with both this species and Couch's in south Texas, including some careful study of the two species at the end of November just ahead of this sighting

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

I didn't refer to anything for this bird specifically, but I did refer to Cin-Ty Lee's video (obviously) in advance of my trip to Texas, which influenced my interpretation

22. Identification aids used when?

None used

23. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:

I'm mostly sure. I would have liked to confirm the calls/get audio

24. Date report completed:

1/9/23

25. 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

26. If yes, may we include your name with the report?

Yes









