

# 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): [One 1<sup>st</sup> winter in formative plumage confirmed by vocalizations \(photo DSC\\_3275\); a 2<sup>nd</sup> bird proposed Couch's by bill shape, unknown age.](#)

3. Parish: [Vermilion](#)

Specific Locality: [Meridian Line Rd., White Lake WMA, 8.4 mi S of Wright, LA](#)

4. Date(s) when observed: [16 December 2024](#)

5. Time(s) of day when observed: [3:35 pm](#)

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: <a href="#">Erik I. Johnson</a>
City: <a href="#">Sunset</a>
State: <a href="#">LA</a>

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): [None, I was birding solo.](#)

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): [None known.](#)

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): [Clear. I had a variety of views of the bird from all directions.](#)

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): [Vortex 10x42 razor binoculars; Nikon D7200 SLR with 150-600 f/4.5-6.3 Sigma lens. All in good condition.](#)

11. Distance to bird(s): I was as close as 50 feet from the birds. They were consistently above me in trees or on utility lines.

12. Duration of observation: About 45 minutes with these and the other yellow-bellied *Tyrannus*, based on timestamps of first and last photos.

13. Habitat: Agricultural to the north, Intracoastal Waterway and scrubby treeline along banks to south.

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

As I walked down this road from east to west, I noticed one yellow-bellied kingbird on the wire, then another, and then additional ones in the trees to the north of the road. In total, there were 6 yellow-bellied kingbirds (3 Westerns, 1 Cassin's, and 2 Couch's/Tropical). The C/T were behaving a lot like the others – sally foraging from the wires and trees, and they were slightly avoiding me when I got too close.

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*):

The birds were mixed with other *Tyrannus* along the E-W portion of Meridian Line Road at its southern terminus along Intracoastal Waterway. In addition to these two birds, there were 3 Western Kingbirds, 1 Cassin's, 2 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, and 2 Vermilion Flycatchers. Compared to the Westerns and Cassin's, these kingbirds were much more yellow higher into the chest (approaching the throat), had a bulkier/thicker bill, and olive-brown (not black) tail. I was initially approaching from the east, thus looking west, somewhat into the sun, but soon got "under" and past the birds so was able to see them well to the north and east, with the sun more to my back.

It was hard to keep the two different Couch's Kingbirds straight in the *Tyrannus* mix, but there were multiple times when I could quickly pick out each bird individually, confirming two birds. In reviewing photos:

- Bird #1 appears to have molt limits within the greater coverts (DSC\_3275, DSC\_3279, DSC\_3340), indicating it is an immature (1<sup>st</sup> winter) bird in formative plumage. This is the bird that vocalized.
- Bird #2 appears to have all greater coverts replaced (DSC\_3258, DSC\_3265), although I can't tell if this is a more "advanced" 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird or an adult in definitive basic plumage. The edging on the primary coverts looks a little more boldly edged in white than the other bird. I believe the bird photographed in flight (DSC\_3266) is this bird. The length of p10 looks relatively long compared to p9, p6, and p5, also making me think this fits Couch's better over Tropical. This is the silent bird.

16. Voice: I tried some playback for all for yellow-bellied *Tyrannus* (Western, Cassin’s, Couch’s, and Tropical), but none were terribly responsive, and they remained silent with the exception of one brief call belted out by a Couch’s perched on the wire, as I was watching that bird (DSC\_3275). It gave the short “chimp” Song-Sparrow-like call, which is similar to the “kip” call of Western Kingbird. No other *Tyrannus* were perched on the wire with it at the time – they were nearby in the trees to the north or behind me to the east.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Not a Western or Cassin’s by having more yellow in the breast, a larger bill, and an olive-brown (not black) tail. Couch’s was confirmed by one bird calling and the other bird’s bill looked similarly short and stout, unlike the longer appearance of some Tropicals. I realize that bill length alone has overlap between the two species, and perception is subject to angle and posture, and I admittedly struggle with distinguishing the two. As the LBRC has received more and more excellent photos of these species, and engaged in discussions about bill length (as well as reviewing specimens), I have gained increased appreciation for the variation in bill lengths/depths. I feel like these birds’ bills were both outside the variation of Tropical. The wing formula of what I’m calling “Bird #2” also seems to be a better match for Couch’s over Tropical with a relatively long p10.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Photos by me, attached. Also added to eBird: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S205688424>.

19. Previous experience with this species: I have seen a decent number of Couch’s and Tropical Kingbirds in Louisiana and Texas over the last 20 years, and am familiar with their various calls, and also the pitfalls in trying to distinguish the two by sight alone.

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

a. at time of observation: None.

b. after observation: Macaulay Library of photos for a refresher of bill photos, filtered for LA and TX. Pyle Guide (2022). <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/kingbirdsX.htm>

21. This description is written from:

	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	
X	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	I typed a few notes in eBird during the observation and expanded slightly upon submission that evening.
X	memory		
X	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: **Yes to one Couch's. Probably yes to a 2<sup>nd</sup> Couch's (vs Tropical).**

23. Date: **19 February 2025**

Time: **3:20 pm**

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**











