

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> .

1. English and Scientific names: *Tropical/Couch's Kingbird (Tyrannus melancholicus/couchii)*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): 1
3. Parish: *Lafourche*
Specific Locality: *south end of LA-3090, at entrance to Fourchon Beach*
4. Date(s) when observed: *28 July 2016*
5. Time(s) of day when observed: *10:45 am*
6. Reporting observer and address: *Erik I. Johnson, 102 Goodwood Cir., Lafayette, LA 70508*
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): *Kiah Williams and Kelly Dempsey*
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): *none*
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): *We saw the bird from below, as it flew over the car, approximately in a SSW direction. It was sunny, mostly cloudless, so blue sky. Sun would have been over our right shoulder as we were facing northish, but also high in the sky. Even so, the bird was not silhouetted at all, and colors were bright and distinct from our initial perspective. The bird became more silhouetted as it flew SSW.*
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): *None initially. Was able to grab binoculars (Swarovski 10x42 EL, good condition) by the end of the observation, but that*

added little to the observation as the viewing was fairly brief.

11. Distance to bird(s): As it flew overhead, it was about 50 feet above, and stayed at that altitude as it continued flying SSW.

12. Duration of observation: About 30 seconds. For the first 10 seconds or so, the bird could be studied (naked eye looks only) quite well – it was directly overhead, offering good profile of shape, and lighting was decent to make out colors.

13. Habitat: Coastal marsh/mangrove behind beach.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): We were inside the car, driving about 10 mph just leaving Fourchon Beach, so the bird was initially spotted as it was flying over the road. Kelly was in the passenger seat, and Kiah was behind her in the back seat. The car/road was facing NNW, and the bird was only seen in flight, apparently coming from the NNE and heading SSW in a straight line. I spotted the bird before it crossed the road, so both Kelly and Kiah were able to see the bird for a couple seconds initially, and Kelly and I could stay on it as it crossed the road. Kiah picked it up again a couple seconds later as it continued SSW after crossing the road. The bird was flapping almost continuously with brief pauses between, not all that dissimilar from an Eastern Kingbird, but slightly more with leisurely flaps. The flight was direct, i.e., not undulating. We watched the bird head toward the horizon to our left for about 20 more seconds, and then immediately turned the car around and headed that way. The end of the road bends to the west here, approximately where the bird was headed, and stopped there to try some playback. There were wires and shrubs the bird could have landed on, although we did not see the bird drop out of the sky. After about 5 minutes of occasional playback (Couch's and Tropical), the bird did not appear, and we suspected it kept heading SSW.

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*): I spotted the bird only just before it crossed the road (moving from NNE to SSW) and immediately noticed the yellow belly contrasting against a grayish head. It struck me immediately as a *Tyrannus* in shape and flight style, but looked “longer” (winged, tailed, and headed) than Eastern Kingbird. As I watched the bird for about 10 more seconds, the tail appeared brownish (not black) and the bill looked long and wide (“big”).

16. Voice: Not heard.

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

likely contender would have been Western Kingbird, which I would expect to have a similar profile in flight compared to Eastern Kingbird. This did not. In particular, the tail seemed long (and brown) and the head looked “large”, and that impression was at least partially influenced by having a seemingly large bill. Given the relatively brief view and that the bird was only seen in flight, other large “yellow-bellied” flycatchers might be contenders (Kiskadee, Sulphur-bellied, etc.), but the gray head (at least from below), lack of streaking on chest/belly, and lack of rufous tones anywhere (e.g., tail, wings) to me eliminated any of these potential alternatives.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): none

19. Previous experience with this species: Lots of experience with Tropical Kingbird in Central and South America (I’ve spent about 1.5 years in areas where Tropical Kingbird is common). I’ve even seen a horizon to horizon flight of Tropical Kingbird from a canopy tower. Less experience with Couch’s Kingbird, with only one trip to the lower Rio Grande Valley, and a few seen in Louisiana. Western I’ve seen here and there. Also lots of experience doing skywatches in Louisiana, where Eastern Kingbird is a common sight in fall, so familiar with flight style/profile as a basis for comparison.

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

a. at time of observation: none

b. after observation: Audubon Field Guide app

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: Well, given the brevity of the observation, I’d be a fool to claim 100% certainty, and a large “yellow-bellied” flycatcher seen in flight has lots of options, especially in the tropics. In SELA, the likelihood of any of these is slim, so whatever this was, it was unusual for the date and location (even Western). All that said, I am with little doubt confident that this was a Tropical/Couch’s type kingbird, especially as I am confident this wasn’t a Western Kingbird.

23. Date: 4 August 2016

Time: 7:45 am

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

