

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*



Folk Name: Arkansas Kingbird

Status: Migrant

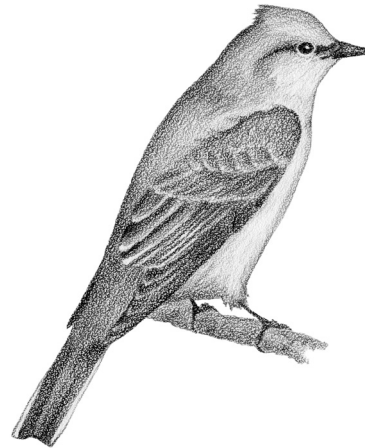
Abundance: Accidental

Habitat: Open areas, fences, wires, snags

As its name suggests, the Western Kingbird is a bird usually found west of the Mississippi River, where it is a breeding resident. Each fall Western Kingbirds head down to southern Mexico, Central America, or southern Florida to spend the winter. Since the early 1900s, small numbers of Western Kingbirds have made their way to the coast of the Carolinas. Most of these rare winter visitors have been found between September and January. This species has also been occasionally discovered inland in both Carolinas.

Western Kingbird has been recorded four times in or on the edge of the Central Carolina region. Two records are from spring, and two were seen in the fall. Bill Hilton Jr. and a group visiting from the University of Minnesota discovered two Western Kingbirds together at Kings Mountain State Park on March 28, 1983. This was the first spring sighting of this species ever in the South Carolina Piedmont. “The full details include the yellow underparts and the black tail with white outer tail feathers.” Dwayne Martin reported a Western Kingbird in Happy Valley, Caldwell County, NC, on September 21, 2003. Chris Talkington reported a Western Kingbird near Rutherfordton, Rutherford County, NC, on May 4, 2011, which is quite late for this species. He noted he had good looks from within 100 feet of the bird while it perched on a powerline near the corner of Highway 74 and Highway 221.

Our most recent record comes from Mecklenburg County where Kevin Metcalf discovered a Western Kingbird on September 17, 2013, at the prairie restoration site in McDowell Nature Preserve. Metcalf was able to quickly take two photographs before the bird disappeared.



He later provided these notes describing his brief but exciting encounter and explaining how he carefully ruled out other closely related species:

Flushed up from shrubs/willows by a Cooper's Hawk near pond in McDowell prairie restoration area. Flew up to dead snag, perched for less than a minute then flew to the south. Photographed. Field marks noted were overall grayish head, back and wings. Throat whitish. Bird was facing slightly away so breast color not seen. Belly completely yellow. Blackish bill with dark eye set in gray eye-patch mask. Wing coverts, secondaries with fairly distinct pale/whitish edging. Tail with squared-off tip, tail blackish with white on outer edge—tail closed (perched). Overall grayish color, combined with shape eliminated Tropical or Couch's Kingbird. Only other contender would be a Cassin's Kingbird. Head and contrast with throat not as strong as in Cassin's, which is far less likely as a vagrant to NC. White edging on tail unlike Cassin's.