

BAYOU CITY BIRDING
ZINE #9
FLYCATCHERS
& SHRIKES

Flycatchers are small birds who fly out from perches to catch insects. Shrikes fly from perches too, but act like miniature hawks, capturing everything from insects to small mammals. Look for them in parks and along bayous where grassy/weedy areas are bordered by trees or utility lines.

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Birds are shown in order of size - the largest ones first.

EASTERN KINGBIRD



SCISSOR-TAILED
FLYCATCHER

FEMALE



MALE



GREAT CRESTED
FLYCATCHER

(LOOKING GRAND OR
CUTE, DEPENDING
ON THE ANGLE)



LOGGERHEAD
SHRIKE

AKA: THE
BUTCHER BIRD



EASTERN
PHOEBE



(DOWNING A CICADA)



WESTERN KINGBIRD



EASTERN
WOOD-PEWEE

(AS USUAL, WAY
UP HIGH IN A TREE)



LEARN MORE...

Flycatchers (including Kingbirds, Phoebes and Pewees) are acrobats with broad, flat bills who fly from perches to catch insects in the air and on the ground. Large insects are carried back to a perch and smacked around to stun and soften them. Insects can be swallowed whole (head first) or plucked into bite-sized pieces.

Although there aren't a lot of flycatchers in Houston, you can find them by scanning areas at the edges of where trees meet open grass and fields. Most are very territorial while raising their young, so you may never see more than one family at a time in the summer.

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SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER

WHEN: April to November, but mostly spring and fall

LOOK FOR: Light-gray head/breast, light-gray belly with a bit of orangey-pink at the sides, dark gray wings, and a black and white tail that can open like a pair of scissors. A female's tail is about as long as her body, while a male's tail can be up to twice as long.

FIELD NOTES: Like all flycatchers, Scissor-tails have excellent eyesight and can see small insects at a great distance. When resting, they often perch on utility lines and fences. When hunting, they perch on tall weeds and other objects, always ready to jump into flight.

1st SEEN ON AT

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

WHEN: Year round

LOOK FOR: A white, black and gray bird who sports a cool black mask like Zorro's

FIELD NOTES: The Shrike is a hawk stuffed into a song bird's body. It hunts like a flycatcher, but also goes after critters like frogs, mice and even other birds. Large prey is killed with a blow to the back of the head and a bite through the spinal cord (yikes!) Males impress females by impaling prey on thorns and spiked fences, showing off what good hunters they are. Hooked bills allow them to rip into prey too large to be swallowed.

1st SEEN ON AT

WESTERN KINGBIRD

WHEN: April to October, but mostly spring and fall

LOOK FOR: Two-toned gray head/breast/back/wings, yellow belly, and a gray tail edged with a bit of white.

FIELD NOTES: Kingbirds are known for their bravery, with the Western's scientific name (*Tyrannus verticalis*) meaning "king of all above." They will even drive off hawks and crows, pecking at their heads and pulling feathers. A few nest here in summer, with each family staying in one area until they are joined by migrating birds and fly to Central America for the winter. The cover shot shows the Western's pale yellow belly.

1st SEEN ON AT

EASTERN KINGBIRD

WHEN: April to September, but mostly spring and fall

LOOK FOR: Black capped head, gray breast/back, gray wings edged in white, black tail tipped in white, and a bright white chin and belly

FIELD NOTES: Like most flycatchers, the Eastern has a big blocky head and can raise feathers on its crown to make it look even bigger. It is most often seen during its spring and fall migration from/to South America. And not to be outdone by the Western Kingbird, its scientific name (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) means "a king's king," which it earns with pint-sized ferociousness.

1st SEEN ON AT

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER

WHEN: March to October, but mostly spring and fall

LOOK FOR: Gray head/breast, yellow belly, olive-green back, reddish-brown tail and outer wing feathers

FIELD NOTES: While the other birds in this zine make regular old nests, the Great Crested uses a hole in a tree and may line it with snake skins, expressing its flair for decorating. Like the other flycatchers and shrikes, it can hover briefly in mid-air, but unlike them, it rarely returns to the same perch it flew from. Because it usually perches in the upper branches of trees, the angles at which it is seen can make it look oddly small.

1st SEEN ON AT

EASTERN PHOEBE

WHEN: October to March

LOOK FOR: Brownish-gray head/back/wings/tail, and dirty white chin/breast/belly

FIELD NOTES: The Phoebe seems to lack a neck, looking like two ping pong balls joined to a tail, which they swish from side-to-side and up-and-down. Unlike many flycatchers, Phoebes often perch within twenty feet of the ground on low branches and fences. And since they like to be extra helpful, Phoebes also whistle their name, repeating the phrase FEEE-beee fee-ba-de so that you can find them and see how cute they are!

1st SEEN ON AT

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE

WHEN: Spring and fall

LOOK FOR: Gray-green head/back/wings/tail, dirty white breast/belly smudged at the sides, and a bill that is dark above and orange below

FIELD NOTES: There are more than a dozen species of flycatchers who migrate through Houston in spring and fall. Many look almost exactly alike (soft gray/green or brown above and dirty white below), and they make IDs extra difficult by perching high up in trees. This Pewee helps by whistling a song that differs from those of the rest, repeating Pee-ah-weeeee! and Pee-oh.

1st SEEN ON AT