

# SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER NEAR SYDNEY, MANITOBA

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Scissor-tailed Flycatcher near Sydney, Manitoba, July 1987

Jean Horton

On 20 July 1987 a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was observed by Betty and Bob Handysides at their farm located 15 miles south of Sydney, Manitoba on Highway 352. This bird was seen frequently around cottonwood trees and seemed particularly attracted to a large water feature near the farm home where it was observed from a distance of only 10 feet. On several occasions the Handysides noted the bird fearlessly attacked crows in the yard and was generally seen in association with Western Kingbirds. They noted that the bird was always seen in the early part of the day and rarely in the evenings.

On 25 July 1987, the Handysides related their sighting to Bob and Rae Anderson of Carberry who contacted

Brandon's Rare Bird Alert. Consequently, on 26 July this Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was seen by Bob and Rae Anderson, Cliff Findlay, Jean Horton, Hazel Patmore and Donna and Norman Short. It was usually with Western Kingbirds and was seen clearly perched on fenceposts and hydro wires on the Handyside farm. Light conditions at the time were excellent with full sun and a clear sky — providing excellent visibility. It was noted that the extremely long forked tail was usually spread open in flight. The upper parts of the bird were observed to be a grey color and the underparts were white with some pink on the sides. Short and Horton observed a reddish patch under the wing when the bird was in flight and both obtained photographs of the bird.

The flycatcher was not seen again until about one week later when the Handysides observed it in a pasture about 0.5 mi. east of the farm house; this was the last recorded sighting.

Twelve other Manitoba records of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers exist for the period 1880 to October 1953.<sup>2</sup> More recent sightings include the following: an immature bird 18 August 1979 by Peter Taylor, 13 km northwest of Whitemouth, Manitoba; one 26 May 1980 by Sharon Howe at Pinawa, Manitoba; one 5 June 1982 by Dennis Fast north of Oak Hammock Marsh; and one 11 May 1985 by the Gordon Grief family at Grand Beach Provincial Park

(P. Taylor and H. Copland, *comm.*).<sup>3 4 1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HATCH, DAVID 1982. *Chick Notes*. Winnipeg Free Press, 30 Jul

<sup>2</sup> LAWRENCE, A.G. n.d. *Chick Notes*. Winnipeg Free Press (supp from records of Herb Copland, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature).

<sup>3</sup> TAYLOR, PETER 1979. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher near Whitemouth, Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 37(4):228.

<sup>4</sup> TAYLOR, PETER 1984. Wings at the Winnipeg. Manitoba Natural Society, Eco Series No.2

## UNUSUAL VARIATIONS IN PLUMAGE OF THE HOUSE SPARROW

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Since its deliberate introduction into North America during the 19th century, the (originally) European House Sparrow has not only spread widely -- more widely, indeed, than many of us would wish -- but also shown so rapid a degree of plumage variation that at least one, perhaps several North American subspecies may already be recognized.

Many individual variations have been reported, including albinistic and melanistic individuals. To the list of variations I should like to add two more, both among the mob of birds on the University of Saskatchewan campus

during late March and early April 1984 and both males.

The cap of the male House Sparrow is normally grey. In one individual, however, the colour of the whole forehead, crown and nape was blue, almost cerulean blue. Otherwise his plumage was standard.

The second differed from the usual pattern in a very odd fashion. It was as if a line of colour demarcation had been drawn across the back, just below (not at) the base of the mantle. The whole middle and lower part of the back and the rump were of a very pale fawn colour. The tail, however, was quite normal.

I should stress that both birds were seen repeatedly, always in the area between the Thorvaldson Building and the Murray Memorial Library. When the mob of sparrows of which they were a part left the campus, they departed