

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABPAE52040

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Tyrannus crassirostris*

**COMMON NAME:** Thick-billed Kingbird; Swainson Thick-billed Kingbird; Madrugador Pico Grueso (Hispanic).

**SYNONYMS:**

**FAMILY:** Tyrannidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** Swainson, 1826.

**TYPE LOCALITY:**

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** One of eleven species in the genus *Tyrannus*.

**DESCRIPTION:** A relatively stocky flycatcher, with a large head and heavy, long bill. Average length 9-9.5 in (23-24 cm). The upperparts are generally brownish (tinged olive in fresh plumage), with a noticeably darker facial mask. The yellow crown patch is rarely visible on the brown cap. The chin and throat are white, grading into pale gray on the chest. Belly is pale yellow, brighter yellow in postbreeding autumn plumage. The tail is long, dark gray and slightly notched; wingbars are nonexistent. Bristles at the base of the bill, is visible as with other flycatchers. (AGFD 1991; Farrand, Jr. 1988). Immatures have brighter yellow from breast to tail (Farrand, Jr. 1988); upperparts browner than adults (USGS 2001).

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Other yellow-bellied kingbirds have shorter, thinner bills, gray crowns, and olive backs, rather than the brown upperparts of the Thick-billed (Farrand, Jr. 1988).

**ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Color photos (Farrand, Jr. 1988: p. 402)

Color drawing (National Geographic 1999: p. 301)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Occurs from southeastern Arizona and extreme southwestern New Mexico southward through western Mexico to northern Guatemala, with northern populations being summer residents only (A.O.U. 1983 *in* BISON 2000).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Breeds locally in sycamore riparian habitats at Sonoita Creek (near Patagonia), Sycamore Canyon (Atascosa Mountains), and Guadalupe Canyon (east of Douglas). Since 1980, they also nest locally in cottonwood-willow gallery forests along lower San Pedro River, from Cascabel to Dudleyville. A few individuals have wintered along the Colorado River near Parker and Laguna Dam. (AGFD in prep).

## **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Like other tyrant flycatchers, the Thick-Billed Kingbird is notably bold and aggressive, often attacking raptors straying near their territories. Their call is a loud, forceful and shrill *weeer!*, *Brr-zee!* or *kit-a-ree!* Other calls reported include a loud, high, whistled *puareet* (National Geographic 1999), and an authoritative *jhu-wheer* and *jhu-weet* (Farrand, Jr. 1988). It hunts from an exposed branch, making short flights out to catch its prey, then usually returning to the same perch. As it pursues something, it snaps its large bill quite audibly. (AGFD 1991).

**REPRODUCTION:** The Thick-billed Kingbird arrives on its Arizona breeding grounds in late spring or early summer, where it builds a flimsy nest of grasses and small twigs high in a sycamore or cottonwood. Eight nests monitored by Baltosser (1980 in BISON 2000) were 10.5-18.0 m above the ground in Arizona sycamore (*Platanus wrightii*) trees. Both sexes incubate the single clutch of 3-4 eggs. Eggs are white, spotted with brown. Very little is known about the specifics of this species' breeding biology.

**FOOD HABITS:** Preys almost exclusively on invertebrates, mostly flying insects.

**HABITAT:** Deciduous riparian woodlands in semi-arid canyons, between 3000 and 6500 feet elevation. Most breeding and nest records in Arizona are from mixed groves of sycamores and cottonwoods, while adjoining slopes are covered by oak-pine woodland or mesquite-grassland. (AGFD 1991).

**ELEVATION:** In Arizona, ranges from 2,100 - 4,300 ft (641 – 1,312 m).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** In Arizona, breeds in sycamore riparian habitats dominated by cottonwood, willow and mesquite. Locally common in cottonwood-willow gallery forests along the lower San Pedro River (AGFD 1996 in prep).

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Unknown. A rare bird that was first discovered in the United States in 1958, the range of this Mexican species has expanded northward since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (DeGraaf *et al.* 1991).

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** None  
**STATE STATUS:** 2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)  
[1B (AGFD SWAP 2012)]  
[WSC (AGFD, WSCA 1996 in prep)]  
[Candidate (AGFD, TNW 1988)]  
**OTHER STATUS:** Not BLM Sensitive (USDI, BLM AZ 2010)  
[Bureau of Land Management Sensitive  
(USDI, BLM AZ 2008)]  
Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region  
3 2007, 2013)

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** **Threats:** degradation and loss of native riparian habitat through overgrazing, wood-cutting, fire, stream diversion, and groundwater depletion.  
**Management needs:** reduce riparian grazing to maintain and enhance sycamore and cottonwood regeneration; reduce diversion and groundwater withdrawal to maintain perennial stream flow.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Better knowledge of its distribution, natural history, abundance and population trends is needed.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** USFS - Coronado National Forest; USFWS - Buenos Aires NWR; BLM - Guadalupe Canyon ACEC; TNC - Patagonia-Sonoita Creek; State Land Department; City of Patagonia; Private.

**SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION****REFERENCES:**

- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1988. Threatened native wildlife in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department Publication, Phoenix, Arizona. p. 19.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1996 in prep. Wildlife of special concern in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department Publication. Phoenix, Arizona. p 19.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 2012. Arizona's State Wildlife Action Plan 2012-2022. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona. 233 pages.
- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 2022. Arizona Wildlife Conservation Strategy: 2022-2032. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona. 378 pages.
- Biota Information System of New Mexico. 2000. BISON Species Account 041055: Thick-billed Kingbird - *Tyrannus crassirostris*. New Mexico Game and Fish, <https://www.bison-m.org/booklet.aspx?SpeciesID=041055>

- DeGraaf, R.M., V.E. Scott, R.H. Hamre, L. Ernst, and S.H. Anderson. 1991. Forest and rangeland birds of the United States, natural history and habitat use. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Agriculture Handbook 688. p.283. Available online at <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/catalog/CAT91959725>
- Farrand, Jr., J. 1988. Western birds. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, New York. p. 402.
- Integrated Taxonomic Information System. 2001. *Tyrannus crassirostris*. <https://www.itis.gov/>
- National Geographic Society. 1999. Field guide to the birds of North America. Third edition. National Geographic, Washington, D.C. pp. 300-301.
- Phillips, A., J. Marshall, and G. Monson. 1964. Birds of Arizona. The University of Arizona Press. Tucson, Arizona.
- Tibbitts, T.J. 1991. Nongame field notes: Thick-billed Kingbird. Wildlife Views, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona. p. 17.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 2007. Regional Forester's List of Sensitive Animals.
- USDA, Forest Service Region 3. 2007. Regional Forester's List of Sensitive Animals.
- USDI, Bureau of Land Management Region 2. 2013. Arizona BLM Sensitive Species List.
- USDI, Bureau of Land Management Region 2. 2010. Arizona BLM Sensitive Species List.
- Zimmerman, D.A. 1960. Thick-billed Kingbird nesting in New Mexico. reprinting from The Auk 77:92-94.

#### MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

*Tyrannus crassirostris*, from the Latin *tyrannus* for ruler or monarch, *crassus* for "thick" and *rostrum* for "beak."

**Revised:** 2001-09-05 (SMS)  
2010-12-15 (SMS)  
2023-01-04 (MBL)

To the user of this abstract: you may use the entire abstract or any part of it. We do request, however, that if you make use of this abstract in plans, reports, publications, etc. that you credit the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Please use the following citation:

Arizona Game and Fish Department. 20XX (= year of last revision as indicated at end of abstract). X...X (=taxon of animal or plant). Unpublished abstract compiled and edited by the Heritage Data Management System, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, AZ. X pp.