

### Brown-crested or Wied's Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus tyrannulus*

The Brown-crested Flycatcher presents the same paradox as the Summer Tanager: a species expanding its range while its habitat has been decimated. First found on the Colorado River in 1921, occurring in numbers there by 1930, and first found west of the Colorado, at Morongo Valley, in 1963, the flycatcher is clearly spreading northwest, out of its stronghold in the riparian woodland and saguaros of southern Arizona. Yet in California it depends for nest sites on large riparian trees, largely eliminated with the taming of the Colorado River. The Brown-crested Flycatcher arrived in San Diego County as a new breeding species in 2000.

**Breeding distribution:** Mary Beth Stowe's discovery of a family of Brown-crested Flycatchers at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs (F24) 26 August–18 September 2000 was among the more sensational events of the atlas project's five years. The two adults fed three fledglings high in eucalyptus trees at a pond in this community of mobile homes within a golf course. Photographed, seen, and heard by many, these birds represented the first well-supported identification of the Brown-crested Flycatcher in San Diego County as well as the first breeding. The pair returned the following year, first found 16 May 2001 (P. D. Jorgensen, NAB 55:356, 2001). Nesting was not confirmed that year, but the last report, on 17 August 2001, may have been of a juvenile (*vide* P. D. Jorgensen).

At least one, probably two, Brown-crested Flycatchers were calling in riparian woodland near the confluence of San Felipe and Banner creeks (J22) 13 July 2001 (M. B. Mulrooney, P. Unitt). Two pairs summered there in 2002, and at least one of these nested in a cavity in a cottonwood (nestlings 7 July). A pair summered there again in 2003 (J. R. Barth, P. D. Jorgensen). Another pair colonized Lower Willows along Coyote Creek (D23) in 2002, attending a nest hole 9 July (J. R. Barth).

**Nesting:** Like the other species of *Myiarchus*, the Brown-crested Flycatcher is a cavity nester, in Arizona relying mainly on old holes of the Gila Woodpecker and flicker for nest sites. As no large woodpeckers nest at Borrego Springs, the flycatchers at the Roadrunner Club probably used an artificial site, possibly the space behind a loose slab of eucalyptus bark.

The incubation and nestling periods of the Brown-crested Flycatcher are still unknown, so it is difficult to estimate when the pair at Borrego Springs may have nested. But the family was discovered so late in the year that the birds must have laid at the very end of the species' breeding season; Bent (1942) reported a latest egg date from Arizona of 17 July. Perhaps these pioneers wandered southeastern California for much of the summer before finding each other, and a suitable nest site, at Borrego Springs.

**Migration:** The Brown-crested Flycatcher is a summer visitor to the southwestern United States, rarely arriv-



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

ing before the first week of May, and with an earliest California date of 24 April (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Fall departure is usually in August, rarely as late as early September, making the late date of the birds at Borrego Springs in 2000 noteworthy, and reinforcing the idea that as pioneers they were delayed beyond the species' usual schedule. During regular monitoring of San Felipe Creek 2002–03, the earliest date on which J. R. Barth noted the species was 19 May 2002.

Two sightings have been reported from Point Loma (S7), 9 June 1991 (R. E. Webster, AB 45:497, 1991) and 13 October 2001 (R. E. Webster, D. M. Parker, NAB 56:107, 2002). Only the latter is well supported (G. McCaskie pers. comm).

**Winter:** Unrecorded. But two winter records for Orange County suggest that the Brown-crested Flycatcher could start a pattern of winter occurrence resembling that of other flycatchers from southern Arizona and western Mexico—the Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, and Greater Pewee.

**Conservation:** The Brown-crested Flycatcher's push west was likely inhibited by the decimation of riparian forest along the Colorado shortly after its arrival, then the lack of woodpeckers large enough to excavate cavities large enough for this biggest species of *Myiarchus*. Thus west of the Colorado the Brown-crested Flycatcher may depend largely on man-made cavities. Its spread into natural habitats is contingent on the maintenance of mature desert riparian woodland, easily degraded by the proliferation of saltcedar.

**Taxonomy:** Specimens from the Colorado River south through western Mexico are the large *M. t. magister* Ridgway, 1884; presumably Brown-crested Flycatchers farther west are the same.