



Figure 1. Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Town of Hamlin, Monroe Co., New York, 7 to 15 October 1990. Photograph by Karren Schiely, reproduced with permission of Gannett Rochester Newspapers.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 51: FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER

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On 7 Oct 1990, I was driving with my wife Hedy along Moscow Road in the Town of Hamlin, Monroe County, when I spotted a flycatcher with a long tail perched on a utility line on the south side of the road. The bird was in an area of open fields that are mixed with scrub, bordered by tree lines, and fronted by residences. The road at this point is within a mile of the south shore of Lake Ontario. After noting the most obvious field markings, I went to a nearby residence, telephoned Kevin Griffith, and then parked about 50 meters from the bird to observe it. Hazy sunshine through a light overcast provided good lighting. When Kevin arrived 15-20 minutes later, he identified the bird as a Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*). Within minutes, four other birders arrived to observe the bird.

The most striking feature of the flycatcher was its long, forked tail, roughly twice the length of the rest of the bird. One fork had a notch in it. The black on the crown extended onto the cheek below the eye. The nape and back were light grey; the wings were darker grey; the underparts were light.

The bird was not only striking in its appearance, but extremely cooperative in its behavior. It allowed Kevin to take pictures from five meters without showing any sign of alarm. Occasionally it would fly a short distance from its perch to snare an insect in midair. When it did, its tail feathers would stream outward. No vocalization was heard.

The bird was first spotted about 3:50 PM, and continued to perch and snare insects until shortly after 5 PM. It then flew off, apparently to roost for the night. However, it was spotted again the following day along the same stretch of Moscow Road, between Priem Road and the west fork of Lake Road, where it remained through 15 Oct. Often it frequented a field of goldenrod directly opposite the utility line where it was first spotted. It would perch on fence posts and hunt at eye level. At this angle, a small yellowish crown patch was often evident, as well as a thin white outer edging along the basal third to half of the outer tail feathers.

The bird was reported on the North American Rare Bird Alert, and was the subject of several newspaper articles. Hundreds of birders from nine states and Canada were able to study the flycatcher.

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[Fork-tailed Flycatcher was treated as hypothetical in New York by Bull (*Birds of New York State*. 1974. Doubleday Natural History Press, Garden City, NY), who listed two Suffolk and one Columbia Co. sightings. Investigation by the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) yielded minimal documentation for all of these reports, but sufficient to include the species on the state list. In addition to the above records, the only other prior report from New York is of a bird seen and photographed by a single observer on Long Island (*Kingbird* 39:190; 1989); the NYSARC has not yet reported their review of that observation. — *The Editor*.]