

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (PYROCEPHALUS RUBINUS) IN BIRMINGHAM

Billy F. Gilliland and Mary Roll

The Vermilion Flycatcher (Pyrocephalus rubinus) breeds across the Southwestern U.S. from Southern California to Central Texas and south to Central and South America. In the U.S. it winters from Southern California across the southwestern states, the Gulf Coast east to southcentral Florida (American Ornithologists' Union. 1983. Check-list of North American Birds. 6th ed. Washington D.C., Am. 2nd Ornithol. Union).

At 1530 on 27 December 1993, in Block 44 of the Elmwood Cemetery, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama, while conducting the Birmingham Christmas Bird Count, Mary Roll spotted and identified a male Vermilion Flycatcher. Others who observed the bird over a period of three days were Dr. Thomas A. Imhof, Billy and Jody Gilliland, Dick Landry and Antony Piazza. The bird was spotted perched atop a small tree about 98.4 ft (30 m) from the observer and appeared to feed on flying insects and on the ground. Twelve photographs were taken by the senior author. These may be the first photos of the species taken in the wild in inland Alabama (Tom Imhof, pers. comm.).

The bird was an adult male, appearing about the size of an Eastern Wood-Pewee (Cantopus virens) approximately 15 cm in length. The body structure, wings, tail, head and bill were also similar to the Pewee. Its crown and underparts were flaming vermilion in coloration. The bill was black and

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there was a dark gray or black streak through the eye. The upper parts and tail were dark gray to black. Its feeding methods were similar to that of an Eastern Phoebe (Sayornis phoebe). It perched mostly in small shrubs and trees no more than 9.4 ft (3 m) above the ground and fed on insects it caught in the air and on the ground. Many times it would perch on tombstones or on dead weeds a foot or less high.

This species is rare in migration and in winter on the Alabama Gulf Coast and occasional in winter on the Upper Coastal Plain. As recent as 1976, there were no records of occurrence in the Mountain Region or Birmingham area of Alabama (Imhof, T.A., 1976, Alabama Birds. University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama). **Billy Gilliland**, P.O. Box 150, Empire, AL 35063 and **Mary Roll**, 709 81st Street South, Birmingham, AL 35206.



Vermilion Flycatcher (Pyrocephalus rubinus), December 1993, Elmwood Cemetery, Block 44, Birmingham, AL (Jefferson County). Billy F. Gilliland photographer.