

INTRASPECIFIC KLEPTOPARASITISM IN THE TROPICAL KINGBIRD
(*TYRANNUS MELANCHOLICUS*)

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Abstract.— Kleptoparasitism is rarely reported in Tyrannid flycatchers. At Caroni, Trinidad, I observed a Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) successfully steal a large insect from a conspecific on 6 October

KLEPTOPARASITISM, THE INTERSPECIFIC and intraspecific stealing of already procured food, has been documented among many families of birds (Brockmann and Barnard 1979), but has seldom been reported in the family Tyrannidae. Previous reports include successful incidents of intraspecific kleptoparasitism for the Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) in Trinidad (Bentley 1991) and Paraguay (Hayes 1992), and a Sulphury Flycatcher (*Tyrannopsis sulphurea*) unsuccessfully attempting to steal food from a Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*) in Trinidad (Hayes 1998). In Alabama, Folkerts (1995) observed a Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) twice fly toward a flying cicada that had escaped from a conspecific; on both occasions the cicada veered back toward the conspecific, which recaptured the cicada. Although this incident could be interpreted as attempted kleptoparasitism, Folkerts (1995) interpreted it as cooperative prey capture. In this note I describe an incident of intraspecific kleptoparasitism in the Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*).

On 6 October 1998, I was driving through the rice fields at Caroni, Trinidad, when at 0852 I noted three Tropical Kingbirds perched on a telephone wire about 15 m away from me. One kingbird was attempting to consume a large insect (resembling a dragonfly) in its bill. The two other kingbirds were perched on the wire nearby (1-2 m away) and began hopping down the wire toward the bird with the insect, which responded by hopping away from the two and then flying away. The two kingbirds immediately flew in pursuit of the bird with the insect. Using its beak, one pursuant successfully grabbed the insect directly from the beak of the host while all three were hovering, but slowly descending, in mid-air. The successful kleptoparasite returned to the wire about 15 m away from its initial perch, followed closely by the two other birds. Facing away from the two other birds, the kleptoparasite consumed the insect within 15 sec.

On numerous occasions I have observed Tropical Kingbirds struggling to swallow a large item of prey while one or more kingbirds were present nearby. However, this was the only occasion in which I observed a kleptoparasitic attack, which apparently oc-

curs only rarely in this species. Hayes (1992) predicted that kleptoparasitism was most likely to occur among the larger species of flycatchers inhabiting open habitats, where potential hosts can be watched at a greater distance, hiding from kleptoparasites is more difficult, the capture and carrying of prey is more conspicuous, and prey items may be found more easily after they are relinquished by the host (Paulson 1986). The Great Kiskadee, Sulphury Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbird are all large, conspicuous flycatchers inhabiting open country (e.g., Ridgely and Tudor 1994), thus conforming well to the prediction.

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