

GCBO'S BIRD OF THE MONTH: AUGUST YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO



Photo by Joe Fischer

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is a breeder within Texas that is more prevalent in the eastern two-thirds of the state as an uncommon migrant and summer resident, but can also be found in the Texas Panhandle and Trans-Pecos Regions. Populations have declined significantly, particularly in the western part of the range where it is a species of concern. They prefer to live in deciduous woodlands where they stay hidden most of the time feasting on their preferred food of hairy caterpillars. In West Texas, they are found in Cottonwood trees. Although they stay hidden most of the time, they are a vocal species that gives away their presence.

Identification is fairly straight forward with a mostly yellow stout decurved bill, a yellow orbital eye-ring, gray-brown upper parts, white throat and belly, large white patches on the tips of the black underwing feathers. The body is long and slim with a long tail. Average length is 12" with an 18" wingspan. In flight, two key diagnostics are the large rufous wing patch and bold white spots along the edge of the tail. Their call is easy to detect as it is a series of slow croaking or hard knocking sounds, ka-ka-ka-ka-kow-kowp, that can last up to 8 seconds. During breeding, both sexes will make a repeating cooing call. Listen for their call in deciduous woodlands from May through August!