



The Hart Beat



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The Vermilion Cliffs of Escalante National Monument, Utah

RED BY ANY OTHER NAME

“Vermilion” is a word you don’t hear very often. As shades of red go, “red” itself is the rock solid standard, fitting as a modifier for a number of rock solid birds, such as the Red-shouldered, Red-tailed and Red-bellied. “Cardinal” is a rich deep color and certainly a fitting description for our crested Christmas bird. “Scarlet” has a naughty “Scarlet Letter” connotation, perhaps like the gaudy Scarlet Tanager. “Crimson” is the color of embarrassment, and to the best of my knowledge has only been applied to the Crimson-collared Grosbeak, an illegal immigrant from Mexico, who came to pick seeds from a feeder in south Texas several years ago. (Another illegal immigrant from Europe, the Red-footed Falcon, did not fare as well when he snuck into Martha’s Vineyard, for he became lunch

for a local red-neck Cooper’s Hawk.)

But “VERMILION!” now there is a red word that evokes mystery, beauty and excitement, and must certainly be applied to a spectacular bird.

Every year one or more Vermilion Flycatchers winter in Florida, coming over from south Texas, where they can be found year round. Usually they take up residence in remote areas in the Seminole Reservation lands between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. This year at least four have been around most of the winter: two in the Everglades and two in Orlando Wetlands Park, a water treatment area for the City of Orlando. http://www.cityoforlando.net/public_works/wetlands/index.htm

At Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP) there is a system of cells surrounded by dikes with miles of roads throughout the park just like many other similar systems all over Florida. However, unlike most other such systems, OWP doesn’t allow vehicles on their roads. Walking over a mile, carrying birding and photography equipment by back-pack is not for the faint of heart.



When found, the Vermilion Flycatchers were far out in the cypress trees in the reservoirs and not readily photographable. But even at that distance they were stunning. Unfortunately, the heavy duty 600mm lens (emphasis on “heavy”) needed to properly catch those gorgeous little beauties remained in the car. Nevertheless, we did succeed in obtaining some



less than satisfying shots which we share here with you.

After spending several hours hoping the birds would come closer to the road for us, we finally gave up in despair, just as a car with four birders arrived with their own heavy duty camera equipment. Obviously, it is a simple matter of “who you know.” We left, “vermilion!” with rage. But not for long, for that same night we witnessed the Tree Swallow Extravaganza, after which we were ready to “paint the town red.” (3/6/12)

