Long-distance migratory connections in Eastern Kingbirds

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Abstract

Billions of terrestrial breeding birds annually migrate from north temperate regions to overwinter in the tropics. Migration thus presumably shapes their evolution, ecology and behavior. However, migratory animals present challenges for conservation biologists because populations seasonally occupy widely separated habitats that are often linked by narrow migratory corridors. Documentation of migratory routes and the distant sites that are occupied by birds in the northern winter is critically important for shedding light on the ecology and conservation of migrant birds, but with few exceptions, ornithologists have not established connections between discrete breeding and wintering populations. Eastern Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) are long distance migrants that I study at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in SE Oregon. They overwinter (somewhere!) in Amazonia, and I propose to use newly developed Archival Geolocators to describe the migratory path, rates of movement, and wintering locations of birds from this population. The Malheur kingbird population is declining precipitously (as are kingbird populations elsewhere), but causes for the declines are unknown. Building on my current NSF funding, I request funds to purchase geolocators to collect data to enable me to pursue larger funding with the NSF to better integrate migration behavior into my current studies, and to help shed light on the cause for population declines.