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## Profile

# Great-crested Flycatcher

*Myiarchus crinitus*

The Great-crested Flycatcher is the only eastern flycatcher that nests in cavities and the only year-round flycatcher at Corkscrew.

It is a bird of the treetops and spends very little time on the ground. When on the ground, it will not hop or walk but will fly, even for very short distances. If prematurely fledged young happen to be on the ground, the parent will fly up from one fledgling and over to another, even if they're just inches apart.

Its foraging is equally aerial, and the Great-crested Flycatcher has three preferred methods of capturing its insect food.

One, it will fly out from a perch for flying insects; if it misses on the first try, it often follows the prey in the air until it catches it.

Two, it can nearly hover on rapidly beating wings to pick insects off of leaves, branches, or tree trunks.

Three, it drops down from a perch to catch prey on the ground; if it's unsuccessful, it flies back up into the air and dives down again to get the prey rather than hopping or running on the ground.

The main foods of the Great-crested Flycatcher are insects and other invertebrates, which account for over 93% of its diet. Those are sometimes supplemented with small berries and other fruits. Of the insects, moths and butterflies are most often taken followed by dragonflies, beetles, grasshoppers, and crickets.

Vocalizations of the Great-crested Flycatcher are either calls or "dawn song."

Although it has a large repertoire of calls, there are four basic ones, all given during the daytime.

The simplest call is a brief, sharp-sounding sound written as *huit-huit-huit*, *wit-whit*, or *wit-wit-wit*. These are seldom given in isolation, and the call denotes moments of stress or excitement, such as in confrontations with neighbors.



The most frequent and identifiable call is a loud whistled note that rises in pitch, written *whee-eeep*. It is usually given in isolation from other calls and may be a contact call between sexes or between parents and young. If heard in rapid succession, it may signify distress as when one bird has spotted an intruder or predator near a nest or fledgling.

A third call is a throaty, rolling, slightly harsh vibrato, written as *purr-it*. It is often given by foraging birds when not excited and may be a location call between paired birds.

The fourth call is a distinctive, noisy, grating call, sort of a *urr* or *rree*. It is higher in pitch than the other three calls and is typically given in a series of three or four bursts, generally given by a male staying near its mate or when separating from encounters with neighbors.

Dawn song, or twilight song, is unique to males and is typical of most of the tyrant flycatchers. The components of the Dawn Song are not unique; they are combinations of calls used by both sexes during the day. The unique features are the arrangements of the dif-

ferent calls into predictable patterns that are repeated throughout the song. Males are usually stationary on a perch and repeat the three-note song up to 35 times a minute.

Males arrive on the breeding grounds and begin giving frequent *whee-eeeps*, rasps, and a series of *huit-huit-huit* calls to establish territories. Females arrive a week or two later and use the *whee-eeep* to maintain a pair bond. In Florida, males begin to settle on their breeding territories in late March or early April. Egg laying takes place during April, May, or June.

Great-crested Flycatchers prefer to nest in dead trees rather than live ones, in natural cavities rather than abandoned woodpecker holes, and in cavities that can be up to four feet deep. The preferred location is toward the top of a canopy.

The cavity is filled with leaf litter or trash to within about 12 inches of the hole and the nest is built on top of that. The nests themselves are constructed of grasses, leaves, pine needles, fur, and feathers.

Much has been written about the use of shed snakeskin as nesting material. Not all Great-crested Flycatchers use it, and studies suggest that they do not associate the skins with snakes, which are their predators. They will use crinkly paper, plastic, cellophane, and other similarly textured substances in the nest lining just as often.

Incubation takes about two weeks and most young fledge by mid-July. Both sexes defend the nest from woodpeckers, starlings, and squirrels; remove fecal sacs; and take care of the young. Only the female incubates, so males forage for food, call, and chase intruders away. After fledging, the young and adults remain as a family group, staying in the nesting area for up to three weeks.

The main predators are snakes and squirrels which get into the nesting cavity and eat the eggs and nestlings.