Flycatchers are small birds who fly out from perches to catch insects. Shrikes fly from perches too, but act like miniature hawks, capturing everything from insects to small mammals. Look for them in parks and along bayous where grassy/weedy areas are bordered by trees or utility lines.

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FLYCATCHERS (including Kingbirds, Phoebes and Pewees) are acrobats with broad, flat bills who fly from perches to catch insects in the air and on the ground. Large insects are carried back to a perch and smacked around to stun and soften them. Insects can be swallowed whole (head first) or plucked into bite-sized pieces.

Although there aren’t a lot of flycatchers in Houston, you can find them by scanning areas at the edges of where trees meet open grass and fields. Most are very territorial while raising their young, so you may never see more than one family at a time in the summer.

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FIELD NOTES: The Shrike is a hawk stuffed into a songbird’s body. It hunts like a flycatcher, but also goes after critters like frogs, mice and even other birds. Large prey is killed with a blow to the back of the head and with a bit of orangey-brown back and outer wing feathers. Shrikes often perch within twenty feet of the ground on low branches and fences. And not to be outdone by the Western Kingbird, its scientific name (Tyrannus tyrannus) means “a king’s bird,” which it earns with pint-sized ferociously.

FIELD NOTES: While the other birds in this zine make regular old nests, the Great Crested uses a hole in a tree and may line it with snake skins, expressing its flair for decorating. Like the other flycatchers and shrikes, it can hover briefly in mid-air, but unlike them, it rarely returns to the same perch it flew from. Because it usually perches in the upper branches of trees, the angles at which it is seen can make it look oddly small.

FIELD NOTES: There are more than a dozen species of flycatchers who migrate through Houston in spring and fall. Many look almost exactly alike (soft gray/green or brown above and dirty white below), and they make IDs extra difficult by perching high up in trees. This Pewee helps by whistling a song that differs from those of the rest, repeating Pee-ah-weee! and Pee-oh.