



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

PHOTOS BY JAMES KENDALL, ESSAY BY BETTY KANNE



A tiny, feisty acrobat is suddenly perceived briskly moving through the dense leafy bushes. At just 4 inches, this active gray insect-hunter appears to be mostly tail that is cocked, fanned and flashed sporadically. This spirited bird's subdued gray-blue tones are accentuated by a distinctive white eye-ring, snow-white tail edges flashing excitedly in order to startle unwitting insect prey concealed amidst dark leaves and tangled branches. A dagger-thin pointed bill is ideally suited for snatching erratically darting insects frantically seeking to

escape its perilous pursuit.

Sporadic vocalizations characterized by thin, wheezy, nasal, scratchy notes pulse through the leafy brush. More often heard than seen, the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher thus announces its return from its northern breeding grounds to spend the winter in our verdant parks, brushy hillsides and stream-side thickets. A successful winter will find the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher well fed, fully fueled for its spring migration north to raise yet another family.

