

**Correcting the Record:  
Boat-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus major*) Breeding in Kent County, Maryland**

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Edgar A. Small (1883) of Hagerstown, Maryland, published the following note on Boat-tailed Grackles (*Quiscalus major*) in *Ornithologist and Oölogist*:

“BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE. — Where is the northern limit of this bird’s habitat? They are common in the Chesapeake Bay in suitable localities as far north as Kent Co., Md. My friend E. G. Nicewaner has collected a number of sets of eggs at Pomona in the latter county. Fish Crows are also common there. — *Edgar A. Small, Hagerstown, Md.*”

Small’s report was the authority for including Kent County, Maryland within the breeding range of this species in *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (Stewart and Robbins 1958). Subsequently, Stewart and Robbins (1958) became the authority for citations in other publications. The first Maryland breeding bird atlas (Robbins and Blom 1996), conducted from 1983 through 1987, reports confirmed or probable breeding for Boat-tailed Grackle in only five counties: Dorchester, St. Mary’s, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester; the historic Kent County record is shown on the “Breeding Distribution, 1958” map (O’Brien 1996). The second breeding bird atlas (Ellison 2010a), conducted from 2002 through 2006, reports breeding in the same five counties. In summary, it states “there was little change in the broad outlines of the nesting range” in Maryland, but the historic Kent County “breeding” record is not mentioned (Ellison 2010b).

Small’s report for Pomona has always been a geographic anomaly, but long overlooked was his correction ([Small] 1884) which appeared under the heading “Correspondence”:

“BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE. (O. and O., Vol. VIII, page 76.) *Edgar A. Small, Hagerstown, Md.*, asks us to correct his note as to the breeding of this bird in Kent County, Md. His informant only saw the birds, and does not appear to have satisfactorily identified their nests.”

Therefore, Kent County, Maryland should be removed from the documented breeding range of Boat-tailed Grackle.

Some comments on these two observers may be of interest. Edgar Albert Small was a native of Hagerstown, Maryland. He was born 8 February 1865, and died 23 April 1884, at the age of 19 years, 2½ months (Hahn 2012, Anonymous 1884a). It was observed that he “... was widely known as a young ornithologist

of much promise” (Allen 1884). “Mr. Small was well known to many of our readers as an ardent ornithologist, oölogist, and artist, in all of which he excelled to a wonderful degree ...” (Anonymous 1884a). Edgar A. Small collected bird specimens and eggs (specimens deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) and published several short articles in his brief career. He submitted numerous observations to the North American Bird Phenology Program (Jessica Zelt [Program Coordinator, United States Geological Survey, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland], in litt.). Some of his bird observations are included in the Frank Coates Kirkwood (1895) landmark publication, *A List of the Birds of Maryland*. His father, Albert Small (1840-1898), was a prominent lawyer in Hagerstown (Anonymous 1884b).

Small was reporting the observations of his friend Mr. E. G. Nicewaner of Baltimore, Maryland (Small 1883). The full given name of “E. G. Nicewaner” is uncertain, but it can be surmised. It is probably “Edwin Gazelle”. There is a Gazelle Nicewaner, age 14 years (born circa 1866) listed in the United States Census (1880), indexed as “Nuiwaner.” (It appears that the family surname was variously spelled [or misspelled] in a variety of records as Nicewaner, Nicewarner, and Nuiwaner.) In the 1880 census, Gazelle is listed with his parents in Baltimore City; his father, Ephraim B. Nicewaner, was a watchmaker. In *R. L. Polk & Co. 's Baltimore City Directory for 1889* (Sheriff 1889) there is a “Nicewaner E B, watchmkr” listed at “329 n Gilmor”. At the same address is a “Nicewaner Edwin G”, the relationship is unspecified, but presumably this is his son living at home, who would have been 22 or 23 years of age in 1889. Further evidence of this father-son relationship are found in *Forest and Stream* (Anonymous 1890) where “Mr. E. B. Nicewaner, of Baltimore” provides excerpts from a letter received from “his son, E. G. Nicewaner” in which E. G. tells of the mammals, fish, and birds that are present at his place of employment in the “Alleghany Mountains” near Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Collecting bird eggs was a popular hobby for young men in that era and the Boat-tailed Grackle observations were probably made on such a foray during the summer of 1883.

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