

**COMMON GRACKLES KILL HOUSE SPARROW**

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On 22 April 1987, at 5:50 p.m., my husband and I were looking out our kitchen window watching an immature female House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and a group of Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) eating sunflower seeds on the ground near our feeder. A moment later, we saw four of the grackles in a "huddle". Two were facing each other with necks extended upward stiffly and their beaks pointing straight up. Their feathers were fluffed out. One of the two was smaller than the other and something lay beside it. The larger grackle was acting more dominant, calling ever so often, and making the smaller one step back a little. Suddenly another grackle flew into the midst of the two that were squared off at one another. Immediately there was a lot of pecking and fighting among all the birds in the huddle. It was obvious that the grackles were throwing something around -- whatever had been lying next to the smaller grackle.

I recognized that something as a bird and ran out and broke up the episode -- all of which had occurred within a time frame of about two to three minutes. What I "rescued" was the immature female House Sparrow. I arrived too late, however, as the sparrow was dead. It had been pecked only around its head and its eyes were bulged and its neck broken.

Did the sparrow stumble into the middle of a dominance display? Did the grackles just get carried away, accidentally killing the sparrow?

[Editor's note: The Common Grackle has frequently been reported to kill and eat small birds. This may occur more frequently where birds are concentrated around food sources, such as at bird feeders. Bent (1958. Life Histories of North American Blackbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, and their Allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 211)

records several such instances. The details provided in the above account are, however, well worth noting and may contribute to our understanding of this behavior.]

#### FIRST SIGHTING OF AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER IN MISSISSIPPI

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On 9 August 1988 at about 2:00 p.m., we spotted an Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) from the south end of Long Beach harbor, Harrison Co., Mississippi. We watched for about 40 sec as the bird flew by from west to east, observing it from as close as 30 m through 7x and 8x binoculars and 22x and 30x spotting scopes. Thinning overcast provided good light. If we were at the center of an imaginary clock and the sun was at 12 o'clock, the bird was first seen at about 10 o'clock and lost at 5. Strong winds were from the south; the temperature was about 80 degrees F. Tropical storm Beryl had just moved ashore at New Orleans.

Our first impression was of a small shearwater, with cigar-shaped body, long, narrow wings, and a thin dark bill. Upperparts were a uniform dark chocolate brown. Underparts were mostly white, but for patches of brown extending down onto the sides of the breast at the shoulder, and brown undertail coverts. The upper surface of the wings may have been slightly darker than the back. The underwings showed a white central area bordered by broad brown edges on both sides and at the tip. The width of the brown seemed about the same for the leading and trailing edges. The tail appeared long. The size of the bill seemed smaller in proportion to the head than in larger species of shearwater.