

The Iris of the Florida Boat-tailed Grackle.—The articles in recent numbers of 'The Auk' in reply to my query in regard to the color of the iris of the Boat-tailed Grackle (*Cassidix mexicanus major*) require some further explanation on my part.

Mr. Sprunt and Mr. Pennock both consider that I am mistaken in my observations as to the color being dark brown, especially in the adult male in breeding condition.

Dr. Wetmore in a personal letter suggests that I have been misled by Ridgway's statements, both in his 'Manual' and in his 'Birds of North and Middle America' that the iris is dark brown in this form. Ridgway undoubtedly recorded this from his personal experience in southern Florida.

My records were made in a positive manner, the labels of all specimens taken have the color of the soft parts of each individual on the reverse side. The small series collected by me, all taken in Palm Beach County, Florida, have the iris recorded as "dark brown" or "sepia" in every specimen, this series includes young male, young female, adult female and adult male. Of the latter three specimens in high plumage taken from January 15 to February 19 all have the iris recorded as "sepia" this means a dark, almost blackish brown. I saw no birds of this species in Florida with eyes of any light color. After I wrote the article in question I remembered that in Bonaparte's plate (drawn, by the way, by Audubon) the iris was figured as yellow.

Also Dr. C. W. Townsend's article had not been published when I wrote mine; on reading his I was impressed with the fact that we had both come to the same conclusion as to the specific distinctness of the two so-called subspecies without any collusion.

The late Louis Fuertes was with me in Florida and he also only knew the Boat-tail as a brown-eyed bird. His figures in 'Bird Lore' depict a lighter brown iris than my records show and also his Great-tailed Grackles are made with the iris of the same color. His marvelous memory must have been at fault here.

As to a seasonal change in the color of the eyes, I greatly doubt the possibility of an almost black iris changing to straw color, but there may be individual variants as is the case in *Psaltriparus*. Such variation is extremely rare in Passerines.

The late Mr. R. D. Camp of Brownsville, Texas, who had a wide field experience with Boat-tailed and Great-tailed Grackles from Florida to southern Texas considered *major* and *mexicanus* to be distinct species; he contended that where their ranges overlapped, I think he said at Aransas Pass, Texas, the two could easily be separated by their respective voices and actions.

I must accept Dr. Townsend's conviction as to the plication of the tail although my observations on this were made at exactly corresponding times in each species, the months of January and February.

The existing situation can be summed up as follows. In southern

Florida *major* has the iris brown in both sexes, cf. Ridgway, Maynard, Fuertes, Townsend, Brooks.

Further north *major* has a pale yellow or straw-colored iris, notably in South Carolina.

C. m. mexicanus in Southern Texas always has a straw colored iris, except probably in the extreme juvenile.

What color are the irides of birds occurring in Louisiana and Northern Texas?

In deciding the question of specific separation Dr. Townsend's records of the great dissimilarity of the courting actions must carry great weight.

Is it possible that the birds from South Carolina to Southern Texas are conspecific while the Southern Florida bird is distinct?

The implication of polygamy in Mr. Pennock's concluding paragraph also calls for investigation. Seraglios are always interesting. Is it possible that we have at our very doors an Icterine with the fascinating habits of an *Oropendola*?—ALLAN BROOKS, *Ohanagan Landing, British Columbia.*

Color of the Eyes of the Boat-tailed Grackles in Florida.—In reference to the color of the iris in the Boat-tailed Grackle recently discussed in 'The Auk' I would say that from personal field observations of the male and female about Orlando, the Kissimmee Prairie, Merritt's Island, and various parts of central Florida, I have found that the eyes of this bird are quite dark and show no signs of yellow or white irides at very close range.

As late as October 4, 1931, while on a visit to Mosquito Lagoon to the Pelican Rookery on an island on this body of water, I had the opportunity of viewing a male Boat-tailed Grackle at close range through a powerful field glass and the eyes showed absolutely no traces of yellow or white, but appeared to be of a very dark brown or black color. My companion, Mr. Hallman of St. Augustine, Florida was asked to verify my conclusions and stated emphatically that he could discern no trace of yellow and that the color certainly was dark brown. Please bear in mind that this was during the winter. I could not say whether or not the bird was one of the year or an old adult male, but it did have the full plumage.

I have been familiar with the bird for over thirty years and have never noted any yellow in the iris of either males or females of this species and have had ample and most excellent opportunities to observe them at close range. I have not killed any of the birds to make closer note of the colors but I most certainly would have noticed any yellow coloring in the eyes had there been any present.

From what I can gather from the controversy there is a difference in the eye-color in different parts of the country, and if both Pennock and Townsend are correct about the Charlotte County birds it occurs in the same district, and during the same time of the year, which would either mean that there are two species or that the age of the bird is responsible. However, this does not satisfactorily explain why the Charleston, S. C., birds all have white or yellow eyes. Perhaps a sub-specific separation is necessary.—DONALD J. NICHOLSON, *Orlando, Florida.*