

The Purple Grackle as a scavenger.—The Purple Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula quiscula*) has been under my observation for the entire summer. This bird is abundant in the National Zoological Park, and it is easy for one to observe and admire it on walks through the park. At this date of writing, August 22, 1943, the birds are gathering in combined family groups and engaging in pre-migration flights. The search for food is always first in their minds and they frequent many strange places to satisfy their greedy longings. Throughout the park are trash containers into which visitors deposit numerous objects, among which are lunch boxes containing bits of food. I have observed groups of *Quiscalus* perching in trees awaiting the deposit of scraps into these baskets, whereupon the group will dive into the container and pick out the food, fly away to a safe place to eat, and return to the container for more.

The many squirrels in the park accept peanuts from the hands of visitors. The grackle does not go this far in fraternization with humans, but diners on the open porch of the restaurant in the park are often amazed to see the bird walking around under the tables and flying away with bits of dropped food. This summer, while I was at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, large flocks of birds took possession of the beach in their search for food particles discarded during the day by bathers. They appeared to be fond of the popcorn that is sold to the vacationists on the boardwalk, and in the evenings searched the beach and boardwalk for any food that may have fallen to the ground.—MALCOLM DAVIS, *National Zoological Park, Washington, D. C.*

The grackle as a fisher.—The observation recorded by Cottam (Auk, 60: 594-595, 1943) reminds me of a rather similar instance of fishing by the Bronzed Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula aeneus*). On August 15, 1943, I was watching several grackles flying about on the shore of Lake Michigan in southeastern Evanston, Illinois. One of the birds swooped across the calm surface of the water about five feet from shore, brushing its feet and breast feathers as it did so, and with its beak picked up a small, light-colored object. The bird momentarily alighted on the sand, then fluttered to the top of some near-by piling. In the bright light, at a distance of about twenty-five feet, I could see that the object in its beak was a motionless fish about one and one-half inches long. After a pause, the grackle, disturbed by the approach of a person, flew away with its prize. Several small fish, apparently young perch, were seen floating dead on the water in the place where the bird had swooped—VICTOR H. CAHALANE, *National Park Service, Chicago, Illinois.*

Remarkable aerial behavior of the Purple Martin.—What seems to the writer to be a remarkable exhibition of aerial activity on the part of a Purple Martin (*Progne subis subis*) was witnessed late in the afternoon of June 18, 1943, over the Inland Waterway near his home. This is across the Ashley River from Charleston, South Carolina, and lies on what is known as Wappoo Cut that connects the Ashley and Stono rivers.

About 7:15 p. m. on the above date, a male martin was seen going through extraordinary aerial gymnastics apparently to no purpose. However, closer observation revealed that the bird had a large, crinkly straw or wisp of grass with which it was very evidently playing. Flying normally at an elevation of about 100 feet, it would drop the straw and then diving, side-slipping and rolling, would plunge beneath it and seize it in its beak again as it 'zoomed' upward to meet it.

In seizing the straw on several occasions it descended to within only a few feet

of the tops of the salt marsh or the surface of the Cut, only to climb aloft once more and repeat the performance. In its swoops to regain the straw, the martin went through practically every aërial maneuver known to 'stunt' pilots! It performed nose dives, falling leaves (waving downward in pendulum-like drops from side to side) and at one time did something which was difficult to credit even while watching it. At the top of an upward climb it slanted its body sharply and went into what airmen know as a stall. For a second it hung motionless, then glided *backward, tail first* for an appreciable distance! As if this were not quite enough, it also accomplished a feat which the writer has never seen any other bird perform except the Wood Ibis (*Mycteria americana*). It turned over easily and completely and sailed along in inverted flight for several yards! As on the two occasions when the Ibis has been seen to do this, there was no movement of the wings whatever. They were held rigidly outstretched, and the bird soared, or glided, upside down. This was done four times in the twelve or fifteen minutes we watched (there were three observers).

The termination of this thrilling performance transpired when the martin finally missed the straw which fell into the water, whereupon the bird flew off in a southerly direction toward James Island. Though I have known the martin intimately for a lifetime, two phases of its behavior came to light in that brief period for the first time in my experience. It indulges in a spirit of play and it is capable of inverted, soaring flight.—ALEXANDER SPRUNT, JR., *The Crescent, Charleston, South Carolina*.

A bird's remarkable concentration of attention.—At seven o'clock in the morning of November 14, 1941, when it was barely clear daylight, three automobiles, approximately fifty yards apart, were traveling at a speed of thirty-five miles per hour in the same direction along a concrete highway in Johnson County, Kansas. The writer was driving the rear car. Suddenly a Downy Woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*) was observed to fly across the road well in front of the first car. After alighting momentarily in a tree beside the road, the bird suddenly flew almost directly toward the first oncoming car, alighted beside the highway, not more than four feet from its edge, and began vigorously to peck at something on the ground. While both the first and the second cars passed within a few feet, the bird remained seemingly entirely unconscious of disturbing influences. This seemed quite unusual because the middle car was old and very noisy. Even when the writer slowed down in passing, for better observation and for careful identification, the bird seemed to be utterly oblivious. Unconcernedly he continued at his early breakfast on the ground until the last car was some distance down the road, when he flew leisurely toward the trees.

Later check with the collection in the Dyche Museum at the State University confirmed the identification. It has been regretted that we did not ascertain the nature of the food.—B. ASHTON KEITH, *Institute of Sciences, Kansas City, Kansas*.

A Robin anting.—For the past months I have read in the literature of ornithology numerous articles on the 'anting' of birds. The description of this peculiar phenomenon did not impress me, for I was inclined to regard the observations as fantastic. Then the articles in 'The Auk' for January, 1943, by H. R. Ivor, Horace Groskin, Charles K. Nichols, and Josselyn Van Tyne aroused my interest in the subject and I determined to witness a bird in the act.

The National Zoological Park has many birds in captivity. I collected many forms of ants that are common in Washington, D. C., and put the insects in the birds' cages. But nothing happened; the birds ignored the ants. While making