

site. On 19 August 1972, after much waiting in and near cornfields, I saw a flock of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) removing larvae in the characteristic manner. These birds foraged to the edge of the field where I was able to watch them with binoculars at reasonably close range from an automobile. Even when finding larvae they remained only a short time on each ear, and the flock quickly worked over an entire field.

The damage to the corn by the single larva in each ear showed the larvae were in an advanced stage of development when removed. This suggests that the birds may have located them by hearing them move, and the sounds the smaller larvae produced were too weak to betray their presence. The Starlings were remarkably successful in finding larvae, missing no ears containing larvae and opening only such ears. Also the husks normally had only a few tears and sometimes only one (Figure 1). The Starlings' removal of the larvae without eating any corn indicated that the larvae were preferred food, as captive Starlings readily ate corn in the same stage of development.

Because the larvae were removed in an advanced stage of development, little immediate damage to the corn crop was prevented by their removal. Both corn earworms and fall armyworms attack a wide variety of plants, and controlling them on corn may have negligible impact on these insect populations. Nevertheless if every act of wild birds must be measured by human values, this removal of larvae by Starlings can only be charged to their credit.

Despite the fact that large flocks of Starlings occur in the region and season involved in this report, bird damage to corn is commonly negligible. Relatively small numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) occur here, but when I found bird damage to corn I usually saw Red-wings either doing the damage or present in the fields. Starlings may often be blamed for damage not committed merely because of their association with Red-wings.

The local and spreading nature of this behavior suggests that Starlings may be developing a new feeding pattern in this region.—PAUL A. STEWART, *Entomology Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Oxford, North Carolina 27565*. Accepted 3 Jan. 73.

**A plumage aberration of *Cariama cristata*.**—In the collections of the National Museum of Natural History is a skin of *Cariama cristata* so strikingly different from the normal appearance of the species that at first it would seem to be a totally different form. The specimen (USNM 222521) has regrettably little data, having been a captive in the National Zoological Park (Washington, D. C.). It is labelled "‘Paraguay’—Rec'd from J. N. Ruffin—Died Feb. 25, 1911." The carcass was preserved in alcohol and shows the bird to be a female with a fairly well-developed ovary (follicles ca. 2–3 mm). The specimen had previously been misidentified as *Chunga burmeisteri* but this was later crossed out on the label and *Cariama* substituted. In size and in all the external features save color, the specimen agrees with *Cariama cristata* and it is clearly referable to that species and not to *Chunga burmeisteri*.

The aberrant bird differs in having the finely vermiculated grayish-ochraceous areas of the normal plumage largely replaced by dark clove brown (Figure 1). The crest is very dark blackish-brown with only occasional traces of lighter vermiculations. The entire dorsum is dark brown. The wing coverts are dark brown with lighter vermiculations; a few of the coverts are considerably lighter than

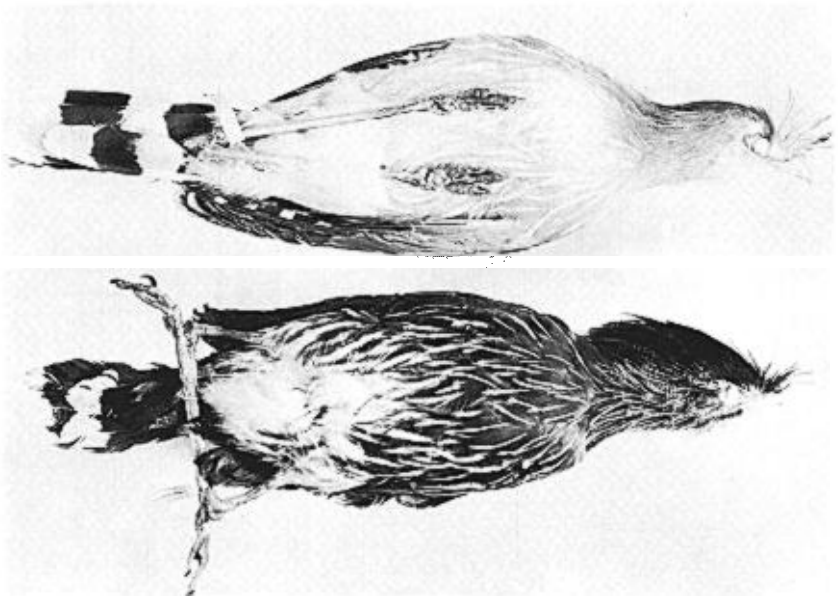


Figure 1. Normal plumage of *Cariama cristata*, USNM 335304 (above) and aberrant melanistic specimen, USNM 222521 (below), photographed by Victor E. Krantz.

the others and approach the normal coloration. The remiges and rectrices are barred with white as in the normal plumage but the white bars of the tail (which is in heavy molt) are more heavily infused with brown flecks. The ends of the neck hackles are a light straw color and stand out against the dark basal portions. The margins of the feathers of the breast and flanks are clove brown, greatly accentuating the white or buffy shaft streaks and very different from the normal plumage in which this pattern is obscured by the paler feather margins. The lower belly and under tail coverts are buffy white as in normal birds but scattered patches of the basal down are brown rather than the usual white.

I find no mention of any such plumage of *Cariama* in the literature. It represents neither a juvenal nor an immature plumage, as these are illustrated by Heinroth (1924, *J. Ornithol.* 72: 119) and Miranda-Ribeiro (1937, *Rev. Mus. Paulista* 23: 36) and are similar to the adult. Miranda-Ribeiro also described presumed geographical variation in this species but this variation does not encompass anything similar to the specimen described here. None of the other specimens at the USNM (some of which are also zoo birds), or those at the American Museum of Natural History or the Yale Peabody Museum (a total of only about 15 skins) shows any tendency towards such dark coloration. It can only be assumed, therefore, that the dark bird represents a peculiar sort of melanistic aberration. It is possible that this melanistic condition was induced by some factor of its captivity, especially as high humidity can at times cause increased melanin deposition in captive birds.

The distinct streaks of the aberrant bird serve to point out that in normal birds the general light tone of the plumage renders the pattern nearly obsolete. This suggests that the ancestors of *Cariama* may have been darker in order for the pattern to be at all evident, and that the pale plumage of *cristata* may have evolved as an adaptation to the arid grassland it now occupies. It should be noted that the other species in the family, *Chunga burmeisteri*, is a forest bird that roosts high in trees (Sclater and Hudson 1889, Argentine Ornithology, vol. 2, London, R. H. Porter). Both species nest in low bushes.—STORRS L. OLSON, *Department of Vertebrate Zoology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. 20560*. Accepted 3 Jan. 73.

**Winter singing of the Purple Finch in Massachusetts.**—Long before the advent of spring the Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) can be heard singing in the northeastern United States. In 1962 I began keeping a record of the earliest dates on which I heard Purple Finch songs. Most of the songs were recorded in Boxford, Massachusetts, and all were from Essex County in the northeastern corner of Massachusetts.

Aretas A. Saunders (*in Bent* 1968, U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 237, part 1, pp. 272–274) describes two kinds of Purple Finch songs given early in the year: The warbling song heard chiefly from February to April and the uncommon “vireo song” usually heard in early March.

TABLE 1

EARLIEST DATES OF PURPLE FINCH SONGS IN BOXFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Year	Date	Song type
1962	20 February	Whisper song
	25 February	Warbling song
1963	2 February	Whisper song
	10 February	Whisper song and warbling song (same bird)
1964	24 February	Warbling song
	5 February	Whisper song
1965	9 February	Warbling song
	6 February	Whisper song (author not in area after 14 February)
1966	12 February	Whisper song
	2 March	Whisper song and warbling song (same bird)
	6 March	Warbling song
1967	4 March	Warbling song
1968	8 March	Warbling song (Topsfield, Mass.)
1969	11 February	Whisper song
	27 February	Warbling song
1970	24 January	Whisper song
	14 March	Warbling song
1971	20 February	Whisper song
	24 February	Vireo song
	27 February	Vireo song and warbling song (same bird)
1972	1 March	Warbling song
	13 January	Whisper song
	17 February	Warbling song