

The Common Grackle in Idaho

An urban invader crosses the Continental Divide

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THE COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) is a widespread bird in eastern and central North America, known to breed as far west as northeastern British Columbia, central Montana, eastern Wyoming, central Colorado, and central and southeastern New Mexico (Skarr 1975, A.O.U. 1983). It is casual throughout western North America (A.O.U. 1983), but since Jollie (1951) first observed a male in November 1950 at Sandpoint in northern Idaho, the species has gradually become more common in the Potato State, particularly along its eastern edge.

As early as the summer of 1967, the possibility of the Common Grackle breeding in Idaho was raised when a pair was found acting as though they might be nesting in Salmon (Rogers 1967). Early in the 1970s grackles were establishing themselves in small towns in western Montana and Wyoming (Kingery 1972), and by the middle of that decade they had started appearing annually in southeastern Idaho (Table 1). The first nest for the state was located near Saint Anthony by Jay Shepard on June 25, 1977. By 1982 other grackle nestings were suspected in Idaho at Rexburg (Rogers 1980), Saint Anthony again (Rogers 1979), and Salmon (Rogers 1982). In the summer of 1983 Trost found suspected breeders at five locations in southeastern Idaho (Table 1), and found adults feeding dark-eyed, begging young at Soda Springs. Further evidence of grackles establishing themselves in eastern Idaho was the sighting of a bird in Driggs in mid-February 1984 (Table 1), probably a wintering individual.

The reasons for the invasion of the Common Grackle into eastern Idaho are probably its ability to adapt to urban forest environments (Bent 1958), and the proliferation of such communities on the

formerly open, treeless country of Idaho and especially Wyoming and Montana. Between 1960 and 1980 human populations in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho increased by 51%, 15%, and 36%, respectively (Population Reference Bureau, Inc., 1982). The resulting urban development associated with these larger populations may have created a corridor of deciduous forest patches for the grackle invasion. All observations of grackles

thought to be breeding in Idaho have been in or near urban areas, with the single exception of birds at Oxford Slough in 1983.

The Rocky Mountains have proven to be a major obstacle to range expansion for many bird species of central North America. By making this leap, the Common Grackle now has the potential of expanding rapidly westward, as the various valleys and communities along the

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Table 1. Common Grackle records in Idaho

Date	Location	Source
Nov. 19, 1950	Sandpoint	Jollie 1951
Dec. 27, 1955	near Lewiston	Verner 1956
June 27, 1967	Salmon	Rogers 1967
May 10, 1972	near Holbrook	Kingery 1972
May 14-20, 1972	Pocatello	Kingery 1972
Oct. 20-28, 1972	Craters of the Moon N.M.	Trost
May 19, 1973	Rexburg	Hunter, <i>pers. comm.</i>
May 11, 1976	Pocatello	Rogers 1976
June 25, 1977	Saint Anthony	Shepard, <i>pers. comm.</i>
June 25, 1977	Twin Falls	Rogers 1977
May 24, 1978	Rexburg	Rogers 1978
June 14, 1978	Ashton	Harper, <i>pers. comm.</i>
May 12 & 19, 1978	Saint Anthony	Rogers 1979
Fall 1979	Idaho Falls	Hunter, <i>pers. comm.</i>
May 28, 1980	Rexburg	Rogers 1980
May 23, 1982	Salmon	Rogers 1982a
July 6, 1982	Rexburg	Rogers 1982b
Summer 1982	Salmon	Rogers 1982b
Summer 1983	Driggs	Trost <i>et al.</i>
Summer 1983	Saint Anthony	Trost <i>et al.</i>
Summer 1983	Soda Springs	Trost <i>et al.</i>
Summer 1983	Oxford Slough	Trost <i>et al.</i>
Summer 1983	Ashton	Trost <i>et al.</i>
Feb. 12, 1984	Driggs	Trost <i>et al.</i>

Snake River running across southern Idaho appear to be excellent habitat for this adaptable blackbird.

We would like to thank Thomas H Rogers for contributing some of these records and for valuable comments.

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