

not read or heard of the Brown Thrasher placing material over a cowbird egg as recorded for some of the warblers.

From these observations, the Brown Thrashers coped with the parasitic cowbird in three ways: by covering over the egg, by disposing of the egg, and by eliminating the young.—WALTER K. TAYLOR AND JOHN W. GOERTZ, *Department of Zoology, Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, Ruston, Louisiana, 25 May 1964.*

Common Grackle attacks Dickcissel.—On 22 April 1964, in Weston, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Mr. Elliott W. Hall witnessed a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) attacking a Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) in his yard.

When first seen, the Dickcissel was feeding with House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) on the ground. The sparrows scattered when four grackles flew in, but the Dickcissel remained and was immediately attacked by one of the grackles. The action was swift but Mr. Hall believes that the grackle struck at the Dickcissel with its bill and at the same time grabbed it with its feet. Although pecked on the head several times, the Dickcissel escaped and half-hopped-half-fluttered to a nearby small cedar, all the while being harried by the grackle. The grackle was finally chased away by Mr. Hall's daughter and the Dickcissel was lost to sight.

Later that afternoon the Dickcissel was found dead in the yard and taken to the Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary of the Massachusetts Audubon Society in Lincoln, where the bird was examined and prepared as a study skin. There were no lacerations on the body of the bird but the skin was contused and feathers were missing from the area just above and behind the left eye. There was a small hole in the interorbital region of the skull. The bird was thin, with the pectoral muscles moderately eroded. It had just completed its prenuptial molt and was a male with enlarged testes. It weighed 21.8 gms and had a wing length (chord) of 80 mm. The skull was completely ossified.

The carcass was examined by Dr. George P. Faddoul at the Avian Diagnostic Laboratory of the University of Massachusetts' Waltham Field Station and was found to be free of internal parasites and bacteriological tests were negative for bacterial pathogens.

Although the grackle's fondness for eggs and nestlings is well known, it is less clear to what extent they prey upon free-flying birds. There are several published accounts of grackles attacking and killing fully fledged and adult House Sparrows (Forbush, 1927. *Birds of Massachusetts and other New England States*. Vol. II:459; Taylor, 1958. *Auk*, 75:222-223; *inter alia*), and we have been told of several instances of attacks on House Sparrows. But in only one of these reports are there details of the actions of the birds *prior* to the attack.

In view of the improbability of a grackle successfully pursuing and capturing a healthy small bird, it seems to us most likely that grackle attacks are largely limited to newly fledged young, or to birds that are sick, disabled, or *appear to be disabled*. It is this latter point that would seem to account for the apparently frequent attacks on House Sparrows, since (1) House Sparrows and grackles are common associates. (2) the sparrows are frequent bathers (dust and water), and (3) the fluttering action of the wings while bathing would make it appear that the bird was disabled and thus "release" an attack by the grackle.

In the case of the Dickcissel, the attack may have been motivated by the fact that the Dickcissel did not fly when the sparrows did, and therefore appeared "sick." And in view of its somewhat emaciated condition, it may have actually been sick.—JAMES BAIRD, *Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts*, AND CHARLOTTE E. SMITH, 75 *Westland Road, Weston, Massachusetts, 20 May 1964.*