

CORRESPONDENCE

MORE NOMENCLATURE IN THE GENUS *Quiscalus*

To the Editor of "The Auk":

In reply to Dr. Frank M. Chapman's friendly discussion (Auk, 56: 364-365, 1939) of the proper name for the Bronzed Grackle, let me say, first, that no one is more averse to useless shifting in the scientific names of our birds than the writer. Only in those instances where the case seems clear-cut and application of our rules of nomenclature demands it, has he personally proposed changes from existing status. His conclusion (see Wetmore, A., Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., 86: 230-231, 1939) that the name *Quiscalus versicolor* Vieillot (Nouv. Dict. Hist. Nat., 28: 488, 1819) applies to the Bronzed Grackle and to no other bird, has been reached only after careful consideration of the facts that have presented themselves.

These facts primarily have concerned a specimen in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, a Bronzed Grackle mounted on a conventional perch, and marked on the bottom of the stand "Amérique Septent^{le}, Ancien Cabinet, 5918, *Quiscalus versicolor* Vieill. Type." A small label on the front of the stand reads "*Quiscalus versicolor* (Vieill.), Type, Etats-Unis." and on the back of the T-perch is the number "356." This specimen I handled personally in May 1938, and so far as I could ascertain, it is the only specimen preserved that Vieillot might have had available when he wrote the description cited above. The only other *Quiscalus* of that period that I could find in the collection was another mounted bird bearing on the bottom of the stand the inscription "Etats-Unis, Charleston, M. Elliot, 1823, 5914, *Quiscalus versicolor* Vieil." On the back of the perch is the number "362." As the label indicates the date 1823, Vieillot could not have had this bird for examination in 1819. The bird marked as the type is an adult male Bronzed Grackle that from the slight wear evident on the ends of primaries and rectrices apparently was collected in late spring or early summer. It may be noted here that while Vieillot cites "*Gracula quiscula* Lath.," following his own name *Quiscalus versicolor*, he does not translate Latham's account, but evidently drew his description from a specimen, since his account is different from that of Latham.

No one has devoted more time to the grackles of the genus *Quiscalus* than Dr. Frank M. Chapman and I hesitate to disagree with him on detailed questions of the colors they present. But in the present instance, I must defend my own observation, which is that Vieillot's description, quoted by Dr. Chapman, applies to the specimen in the Paris Museum marked as Vieillot's type. While that type specimen is far away as I write these lines my notes made on it as I examined it are before me, and my remembrance of it is clear.

To check the matter further, also before me as I write is an adult male Bronzed Grackle taken May 12, 1938, at Waverly, Union County, Kentucky, not far from the Ohio River in the northwestern part of the State. This is a breeding bird in the slightly worn plumage of the early breeding season. It is representative of its group and is in no way peculiar.

The handsome coloration in the males of all of the races of the genus *Quiscalus* is due to the reflection of light from the structural features of the feathers. As I turn this specimen from Kentucky so that its feathers receive the light from varying angles I note in the plumage shades of blue, purple, violet and green—in other words the hues described by Vieillot in his bird more than one hundred and twenty years ago. I get the same color effects from other male Bronzed Grackles from various

regions in the Upper Mississippi Valley as I take them up and turn them in the light for examination.

On these grounds, unless definite proof to the contrary can be advanced, it has seemed to me necessary that we accept this labelled specimen as the type of *Quiscalus versicolor*. If we do not accept it, then many other current names in ornithological literature, based on specimens of similar status and widely used today, are unstable and in jeopardy. I heartily wish that I could follow Dr. Chapman's desire to believe Vieillot's name of uncertain application, but from present information it appears to me unavoidable to consider that it applies truly to the Bronzed Grackle.

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