

## CORRESPONDENCE

## THE BRONZED GRACKLE AS A SPECIES

EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':—Whether or not the A. O. U. Committee's decision to accord full specific rank to the Bronzed Grackle meets with general approval, it certainly will stimulate thought concerning the subject of speciation, and discussion among those who are not made inarticulate by what they may feel is beyond their depth.

From 1924 to 1929, I studied Pennsylvania's grackles assiduously, interesting myself especially in areas in which the range of the so-called Purple Grackle met that of the Bronzed. My paper covering this subject was never published, but I now contemplate with interest the belief expressed therein that the Bronzed Grackle may have spread northward through the United States from Mexico while the Purple Grackle's ancestors came from the West Indies by way of Florida—in short that the two were distinct species whose evolution was so essentially convergent that when they finally did meet in various parts of the eastern and southern United States they readily interbred.

This concept intrigued me. But I now believe I was wrong, and I believe the Committee's decision—whatever the basis therefor—is wrong, for when two or more anatomically very similar forms have the same color-pattern, call-notes, courtship behavior, nesting habits, roosting habits, molts, foods, etc., and interbreed indiscriminately wherever they occur together, they certainly must be called the same species if the term is to have a truly biological meaning. The Bronzed Grackle and Purple Grackle have spread out over considerable areas in which they now "geographically replace" other forms of the genus. Each has evolved color-characters which make average specimens instantly recognizable. But no mechanism has ever completely, or more than temporarily, isolated either. Wherever *Quiscalus* has spread, it has nested more or less colonially in drowned woodlands, in clumps of coniferous trees in villages, in bois d'arc hedges, in bridges and buildings, even in cattail marshes, and obtained food in fields, meadows, forest edge, and open woodland close by. This sort of summer *oikos*, or home, has been readily available to all forms of the genus as they have spread northward and northwestward from Florida.

It is interesting, and desirable, to consider the possibility that the Bronzed Grackle may have budded off and become a full, separate species; but so long as the bird itself recognizes no essential differences between itself and other forms of its genus with which it comes in contact during the breeding season, ornithologists may well accept its own obviously satisfactory decision in the matter and name it accordingly.

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