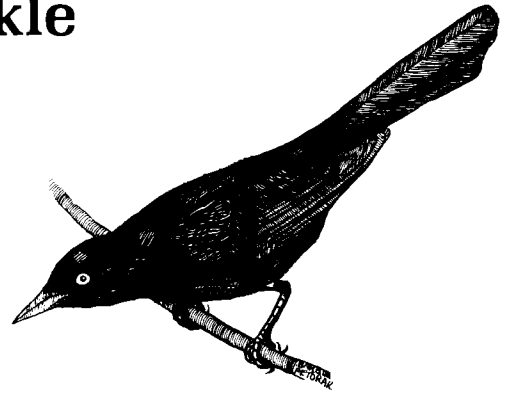

An unusual Common Grackle in central New York State

Roy S. Slack and Harry E. Slack, III



During the spring of 1977 the authors were trapping and banding Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) at a colony near Phoenix, New York (coordinates 431-0761). The senior author had begun banding studies at this colony during the spring of 1976. On 5 May 1977 a Common Grackle was banded (1213-89509) as a hatching-year (HY), unknown sex bird. This paper discusses this bird in relation to the data collected at the colony to date and raises some questions concerning the origin of the bird.

The Common Grackle is a common breeding bird in New York State. Nestlings have been reported from 3 May to 28 June and fledglings from 18 May to 29 July (Bull 1974). During the two years of banding at the Phoenix colony, the earliest nestlings were banded on 13 May 1976 at an estimated age of ten days. Using figures for incubation time given by Bent (1958) and Harrison (1975), we can estimate that the earliest nestling would have hatched from an egg that was laid on approximately 20 April. The earliest egg date for New York State that is known to the authors is 12 April (Bull 1974). It is these dates that raise some questions concerning the bird banded on 5 May.

If we assume approximately 12 days until fledging (Bent 1958), and that the bird was captured on the same day that it fledged from the nest, then the bird would have hatched on or about 24 April. Assuming 11 days of incubation as given by Harrison (1975), the egg would have been laid around 13 April. This would be within one day of the earliest egg date known for the state and certainly much earlier than previously noted at this colony. These assumptions, however, are based upon the bird having been captured on the same day that it fledged, but this assumption is not supported by data or observations noted by the authors.

The bird was banded as an HY because it was capable of sustained flight. Feather development also indicates that the bird was not just out of the nest. The wing chord (124 mm) and tail length (115 mm) were just within the lower limits of the range of measurements for thirty-one adult females (wing 123-135 mm; tail 115-135 mm) measured at

this colony. Exposed culmen (28 mm) and tarsus length (22 mm) are also within the measurement ranges for adult females (culmen 25-29 mm; tarsus 20-26 mm) and indicate that the bird was nearly full grown. The fact that this bird was captured in a Potter trap baited with sunflower seeds and was not being fed by parents also is indicative of a bird that was not recently fledged. All of these observations would indicate that this bird probably fledged in early to mid-April and would have hatched from an egg that would have been laid around mid-March. Thus, questions arise concerning the origin of this bird.

With the winter weather of 1976-1977 and the fact that severe weather persisted in central New York into late April, it would seem unlikely that a local nestling would have survived. Where then was the origin of the bird? Is it possible that this grackle was from a nest located much farther south and that it migrated north with other grackles when they began to return to their nesting grounds? If so, might not its parents also move north and possibly nest again? The authors would be interested in the comments of others who have banded grackles at nesting colonies, particularly in southern states where colonies might disband earlier in the year.

Literature cited

- Bent, A.C. 1958. Life histories of North American blackbirds, orioles, tanagers and allies. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull, 211.
- Bull, J. 1974. Birds of New York State. Doubleday/Natural History Press, Garden City
- Harrison, H.H. 1975. A field guide to birds' nests. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. ♦
- (RSS): Terrestrial Environmental Specialists, Inc., 8398 Oswego Road, Liverpool, NY 13088.
- (HES): Serology Dept., West Virginia State Hygienic Laboratory, South Charleston, WV 25303.