

OREGON'S FIRST RECORDS OF THE GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

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The Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) was first recorded in Oregon on 16 May 1980, when an adult male was seen by numerous observers at Malheur Field Station (MFS), ± 50 km SSE of Burns, Harney Co., Oregon. The individual was consistently observed within 10 m as it fed with Yellow-headed (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) and Brewer's (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*). The grackle was considerably larger than the associating icterids, and the long tail formed the characteristic vee or keel. The eye color was yellow. A photograph of the bird was published in *American Birds* (Rogers 1980a). Following the initial sighting, several other Great-tailed Grackles were found in Oregon during 1980 and 1981.

Since the turn of the century several avian species have been expanding their range northward in North America. East of the 100° meridian the Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), Tufted Titmouse (*Parus bicolor*), Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) and Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) have invaded regions where they were absent in 1900. West of the 100° meridian Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*), Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) and others have also expanded their range northward. Most of these range expansions have resulted from man's drastic and widespread changes of the environment (Terres 1980). In the east, forest clearings and urban developments and, in the west, shelterbelts, vegetation plantings around human settlements, and water and agricultural developments have created habitat that was not available 80 years ago.

The Great-tailed Grackle is among the species that has moved north from its original range. At the turn of the century the species occupied brush habitat from southern Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, south through Mexico and Central America, to northern South America (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). About 1912, grackles began moving north from south Texas. The range expansion was slow at first, but a rapid invasion into west Texas occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. By 1958 it had arrived in the Texas Panhandle (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). I found two Great-tailed Grackle nests in the panhandle's southwest corner (± 20 km S of Friona, Parmer Co.) in June 1961. Faanes and Norling (1981) described the species' range expansion through Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado, and reported on the first nesting record for Nebraska.

In the 1970s, somewhat later than the Great Plains invasion, the Great-tailed Grackle began spreading from southern New Mexico and Arizona. Extensive deserts probably delayed their progress north of much of their original range, particularly in Arizona, until sufficient habitat changes had occurred. On 1 May 1973, the species was seen at Havasu National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Mohave Co., in northwest Arizona. The first record in Nevada occurred 16 April 1973 near Las Vegas, Clark Co. (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). A bird observed at Ruby Lake NWR, Elko Co., on 15 May 1978 was the first report from northern Nevada (Kingery 1978). In the summer of 1979, Utah had its first record when a single bird was seen near St. George, Washington Co.; and on 13 and 18 May 1980, two to eight individuals were recorded in the same county (Kingery 1980). A westward expansion was also occurring. Small (1974) reported it was first noted in the lower Colorado River Valley, California, in 1964, and was nesting by 1969.

NOTES

Since the Great-tailed Grackle was first seen in Oregon in mid-May 1980, several additional records have accumulated. Apparently, several males were present in 1980. I know of the following records: one at Page Springs Campground, 4 km SE of Frenchglen, Harney Co., on 17 May; two at John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Grant Co., on 18 May; and one had reached northeast Oregon near La Grande, Union Co., on 5 June (Rogers 1980b). I also know of four records in 1981: one male at MFS on 8 and 9 April; one photographed at Fields, Harney Co., during mid-May (H. Nehls pers. comm.); one male at Page Springs Campground on 19 June (D. Taylor pers. comm.); and another male in Hines, Harney Co., on 19 July (S. Thompson pers. comm.).

Great-tailed Grackles inhabit flatlands and avoid hills, mountains, heavily wooded areas and waterless deserts (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). Few of these obstacles separate southeast Oregon from the species' original range in southern Arizona. Great Basin mountain ranges trend mostly north to south. Hills are low and scattered, and heavily wooded areas are non-existent except on isolated mountain ranges. Their major extrinsic barrier was probably great expanses of waterless desert. The recent introduction of mechanized sprinkler irrigation systems has resulted in increased agricultural developments in Nevada and southeast Oregon. These developments have reduced water deficiencies in former expanses of dry desert and may account for the grackle's rapid invasion into eastern Oregon, compared to the decades it took the species to reach northwest Arizona and southern Nevada from its historical range.

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