

Turkey to that time, but the bird may have continued her attack if we had not interfered. The bird had apparently pecked the snake several times on the head as multiple superficial wounds were present, and the brille and cornea of the right eye and the brille of the left eye were perforated. The only other external wound was 65.5 cm posterior to the rostrum where the Turkey apparently pecked the snake as she picked it up and shook it.

The conditions under which this Turkey-snake encounter took place are unknown. However, this event occurred during the normal nesting season for Turkeys. That there were only 2 hens in the group suggests they were involved in nesting activities since females in this area rarely occur in such small aggregations except during successful breeding seasons.

Though rarely reported, Turkey-snake encounters are not unprecedented. Jennings (Texas Game and Fish, 14[8]:3, 1956) reported a Turkey hen severely beating a 1 m rattlesnake with her wing.—SAMUEL L. BEASOM AND OLIVER H. PATTEE, *Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M Univ., College Station 77843. Accepted 29 Oct. 1974.*

Hooded Merganser kills a meadow vole.—On 27 August 1974 at 12:30, I saw an immature (1½ years old) male Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) kill a young meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) and attempt to swallow it. The vole, a female, was 83 mm long (body and tail) and weighed 9.1 g. The merganser was in an outdoor pen (4.5 m × 9.0 m) at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland. It was hatched from an egg collected in the wild and artificially incubated and maintained on a diet of duck breeder pellets and dry dog food. The merganser caught the vole in tall grass at the edge of a water tank and bit down on the head repeatedly. After the vole was dead, the bird made several unsuccessful attempts to ingest it. I found that the vole's skull was completely crushed. On 29 August, I found a second juvenile vole dead in the water tank. It was a male, 95 mm long and weighing 10.0 g. Its skull was crushed also. These observations suggest that Hooded Mergansers may on occasion capture and ingest small mammals.

The food of Hooded Mergansers consists mainly of crustaceans, small fish, frogs, insects, and some vegetable matter (Kortright, *The ducks, geese, and swans of North America*, American Wildlife Inst., Washington, D.C., 1942; Bent, *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 126, 1923; Vermeer et al., *J. Wildl. Manage.*, 37:58–61, 1973). I have found no report of small mammals being taken as food by Hooded Mergansers, although Salyer and Lagler (*J. Wildl. Manage.*, 4:186–219, 1940) report shrews (*Sorex*) being found in the stomachs of two American Mergansers (*Mergus merganser*).—DONALD H. WHITE, *Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD 20811. Accepted 7 Nov. 1974.*

Food washing by grackles.—It is well known that Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) will place hard bread and crackers in water to soften them before eating (Bent, *U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 211, 1958), but variations of this kind of behavior do not seem to have been recorded. At my winter home in Ocala, Florida, for years I have watched this species “dunk” bread in water. The local Common Grackles will do this

whether the bread is hard and dry, fresh, or even presoaked in water. The presoaked bread often disintegrates when it is rewashed. When the bread is still firm enough after soaking, it may be held in one foot and fed upon at the edge of the water, it may be carried away, or some or all of it may be left in the water and returned to later. Some individuals hold the bread in their bill, dip it in and out of the water, then fly away with it. Others drop the bread into the water and wait a few seconds before retrieving it. The bread often sinks, and a bird may immerse its head over its eyes to reach it. I have also seen grackles pick up a piece of dry bread, fly away with it, and then return to dunk it. I have never seen Common Grackles drinking in my yard, but have repeatedly seen them tip their heads back to let the water from well soaked bread run down their throats. Most of the bread dunking is done in a ground-level bird bath, but the birds will also use rain puddles on yard furniture and on the house roof.

I often run an insect trap in my yard at night, and habitually empty the specimens I do not need onto the ground the next morning. On 21 April 1973 I left a pile of insects, predominantly beetles but including a large mole cricket, near the bird bath. As I walked away a Common Grackle flew to the bath with a large mulberry in its bill. It perched on the rim and vigorously swished the ripe berry through the water. After it washed the fruit the grackle turned as if to fly, then noticed the insects on the ground. The bird immediately dropped the mulberry and jumped down to pick up the cricket. The grackle then returned to the bath, washed the cricket thoroughly, and after working it through its bill, flew away with the insect.

During the following year I found that this population of Common Grackles washes many kinds of food in water: both soft items, such as presoaked bread, and hard ones, such as local fruit and peanuts. When I put out whole raw peanuts, the grackles usually remove the nuts from the shell and then wash them. The peanut skin often comes off in the washing process.

An especially interesting incident occurred on 4 July 1974. A neighbor set out a half watermelon that had been only partially scooped out, and several of the local mammals, birds, and insects came to feed on it. The Common Grackles pried out pieces of fruit and washed them in the melon juice that had accumulated in a deep puddle in the rind.

I have looked for washing behavior in the Common Grackles at my summer home in Gaines, Pennsylvania, but have never seen it. When given hard bread the Pennsylvania grackles work vigorously at it, with one foot holding the food down, and they sometimes almost pull themselves over backward in their efforts. Although water is readily available at this location, apparently the soaking technique has never been learned by this population.

Similarly, all but one of the other species in my Florida yard have not learned the dunking technique. The single other instance of food washing I have recorded occurred on 10 February 1974, and involved a male Boat-tailed Grackle (*Cassidix major*). After watching Common Grackles dunking, it picked up a piece of bread and followed a Common Grackle to the water where the Boat-tail dunked before eating. Bent (op. cit.) notes bread soaking behavior in populations in Maine and Washington, D.C. My observations in Florida and Pennsylvania indicate that this behavior is widespread but not ubiquitous in Common Grackles. Clearly washing is not necessarily limited to particular types of food, hard or soft, natural or artificial. Apparently it is one of those types of behavior that, once learned by a local population, is performed relatively indiscriminately.

My thanks to Mary Clench for her help in writing this note.—MARY W. WIBLE, 517 NE 9th St., Ocala, FL 32670. Accepted 29 Oct. 1974.