

NOTES

HEAD COLOR IN BRONZED COMMON GRACKLES, *QUISCALUS QUISCUA VERSICOLOR*

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In the Report of the California Bird Records Committee: 1995 Records (K. L. Garrett and D. S. Singer, *W. Birds* 29:133–156, 1998), a sight record of the Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) from Bishop, Inyo County, 29 September 1993, was listed among “Records not accepted: Identification not established.” The report stated that “Most members felt a Common Grackle was seen, but the head gloss was described as purple, a characteristic atypical for *Q. q. versicolor*, the only subspecies of the Common Grackle recorded in California. Although interpretation of color is subjective, the word ‘blue’ perhaps best describes the head gloss in *versicolor*.” This is a misleading oversimplification.

The Carnegie Museum of Natural History has a large series of *Q. q. versicolor* in unworn plumage, mostly October, and mostly of specimens salvaged in Pittsburgh from poisoned migrating flocks. These were all preserved as study skins, specifically for study of individual variation. I examined 120 of these specimens (57 males, 63 females) to document head color. Although it is true that “interpretation of color is subjective,” I had little difficulty in scoring head color into the following categories: green (G), blue-green (BG), blue-green with one or more areas purple (cheeks, forehead, throat) (BGP), blue (B), blue with one or more areas purple (BP), or purple (P). The series divided as follows:

Males: BP, 21; BGP, 11; P, 10; G, 9; BG, 6.

Females: BG, 24; G, 17; BP, 9; B, 8; P, 5.

Thus 24% of this series had head colors an unqualified “purple,” and 65% had some areas of purple on the head that could be conspicuous, depending on the light and the angle.

Some of these grackles showed some evidence in their back color of introgression from the eastern Purple Grackle, *Q. q. stonei*, manifested by a varying extent of purplish iridescence anterior to the bronze of the back. However, an unpublished study of this series by Kristin Williams showed that there was no correlation between back color and head color.

It would appear that the description of the head gloss as “purple” was an insufficient cause to reject the Bishop record of a Common Grackle.

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