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Notes on Banding Common Grackles in Meade County, Kansas

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Abstract -- A total of 31 Common Grackles were captured while banding during a late spring snowstorm at a feeding station in Meade, Meade County, Kansas, on 14 April 2014. Of these 31, one bird was a recapture from 2012, one was recaptured later in the summer (2014), one was recovered in Colorado, and one was encountered from Colorado. An additional encounter from eastern Colorado during winter in Meade, and a recovery of a Meade bird from southeastern Oklahoma during winter, suggest birds from the front range of Colorado winter from Meade, Kansas, through southeastern Oklahoma.

INTRODUCTION

Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) are found state-wide in Kansas (Thompson *et al.* 2011). In Meade County, they are a common bird in all seasons except winter when they are uncommon (Flowers 1995). Thompson *et al.* (2011) state that the migration of this species is “difficult to define because of overlap of wintering birds and the arrival or departure of summer residents.” They list 84 out of state banding recoveries of Common Grackles, banded in Kansas and captured elsewhere, including 31 from Texas; 16 Louisiana; eight each from Arkansas and Oklahoma; and one from Colorado. They list an additional 144 encountered, banded elsewhere and recaptured in Kansas, from Arkansas; 75 Texas; 16 Oklahoma; 4 Louisiana; and two from Colorado (*Ibid*). One additional Common Grackle banded in Colorado was later encountered in Meade, Kansas, and two banded in Meade were recovered in Colorado (TLF unpubl. data). Recent Common Grackle bandings in Meade may shed additional light on the movements of this species in southwestern Kansas.

METHODS

Study Area - A backyard banding station, established in 1983, is located in the small rural town of Meade, Kansas (37.29107° N, -100.337318° W). The station is located in an old residential area of the town surrounded by mature ornamental trees of species typical of the area including: American elm (*Ulmus americana*); Siberian elm (*U. pumila*); lacebark elm (*U. parvifolia*); red mulberry (*Morus rubra*);

black locust (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*); honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*); tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*); Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*); eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*); Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*); arbor vitae (*Thuja orientalis*); catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides*); and a wide variety of ornamental shrubs and fruit trees. The station is operated intermittently and uses both mist nets and walk-in traps.

Capture and Banding - All birds were captured using baited, walk-in traps, and were banded with standard aluminum bands under federal banding permit #22849.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Banding – The initial arrival of Common Grackles began on 4 April 2014 when 10 were banded. Twenty more were banded during the period from the 5th through the 13th of April. On 14 April 2014, three inches of fresh snow was on the ground at the banding station resulting in an influx of Common Grackles and Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) in the area. Yellow-headed Blackbirds are a locally uncommon species, at the banding station (TLF unpubl. data). A total of 29 grackles were banded on the 14th of April. Banding continued through June 2014.

Recaptures, Recoveries and Encounters – One Common Grackle, banded as an adult in June 2012 at Meade was recaptured on 14 April 2014 (Table 1). Another bird banded on 14 April 2014 was later recaptured at the Meade banding station 56-days later on 9 June 2014 (Table 1). This female bird showed a well-developed “brood patch” indicating local nesting.

Table 1. Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) recoveries, encounters, and recaptures from Meade, Meade County, Kansas.

Banding Location	Date	Recovered Location (Distance)	Date
KS			
Meade, Meade County	3 April 2010	McClain County, OK (331.5 km SE Meade)	22 March 2012
	21 June 2012	Meade County, KS	14 April 2014
	7 April 2013	Larimer County, CO (550.4 km NW Meade)	11 July 2014
	14 April 2014	Meade County, KS	9 June 2014
	14 April 2014	Douglas County, CO (463.5 km NW Meade)	28 June 2014
CO			
Boulder County	20 Aug. 2012	Meade County, KS (529.5 km NW Meade)	14 April 2014

A grackle banded by Nancy Gobris, in August 2012, as an adult at the Allegra Collister Nature Preserve west of Longmont, Boulder County, Colorado, was also

captured on 14 April 2014 in Meade (Table 1). This Colorado bird was the first bird ever encountered at the Meade station which was banded elsewhere.

Another Common Grackle was banded on 14 April 2014 in Meade and was found dead on 28 June 2014 by Susan Lautenbach at her residence in suburban Parker, Douglas County, Colorado (Table 1). Lautenbach (pers. comm.) recently reported that more Common Grackles were nesting near her home and that this was the first banded bird she had encountered.

Four encounters/recoveries out of 31 birds (12.9%) handled in one day is virtually unheard of by bird banders dealing with passerines. According to the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) only about 1.3% of near-passerines and passerines are recovered (BBL 2011).

Two additional Common Grackles banded in Meade confirm a connection between the front range of Colorado and continued southeasterly movement at least through Oklahoma (Table 1). An individual banded in Meade was encountered by John Sutterfield in Newcastle, McClain County, Oklahoma (Table 1). The second was encountered by Randy Miller in Fort Collins, Larimer County, Colorado (Table 1).

All three of the grackles reported from Colorado have been found along a 120.7 km stretch of the front-range during the breeding season. The grackles banded in Meade and recovered in Oklahoma indicates wintering in Oklahoma. Connecting these three locations reveals a northwest and southeast migratory pattern from Colorado to Oklahoma. This small data set is indeed supported by two larger banding data sets from Arkansas and South Dakota also showing a northwest movement of Common Grackles in the spring and southeast movement in the fall (James and Neal 1986, South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991).

An analysis of Christmas Bird Count data shows the largest concentration in the western part of the Common Grackles winter range occurring in southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana (Root 1988). During one decade (1988-1997), large numbers of grackles were counted on CBCs in Oklahoma compared to other decades (Johnsgard and Shane 2009). Oberholser (1974) shows very few Common Grackles wintering in the west half of Texas, and that status has not changed a lot in recent times, at least in the Texas Panhandle (Seyffert 2001). Consequently it does make sense for Common Grackles departing for a wintering ground from Colorado or western Kansas to head in a southeasterly direction to reach suitable wintering grounds in southeastern Oklahoma, eastern Texas, Arkansas or Louisiana.

This unusual event demonstrates that local breeding birds may winter and mingle with migratory individuals from elsewhere. In this case, the large flock of Common Grackles contained migrating individuals moving northward from their wintering grounds back to their nesting grounds in Colorado, or places farther north, and local breeding birds from Meade. An alternative hypothesis; the flock heading toward Colorado may have lingered in Meade due to stormy weather, thus, combining with local birds where food was available. At least one of the Common Grackles stayed in the Meade area to nest. One summering bird banded nearly two

years earlier in Meade was mixed with the same flock of birds. These last two birds were local residents.

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