

**THE SHINY COWBIRD
(*MOLOTHRUS BONARIENSIS*) REACHES ALABAMA**

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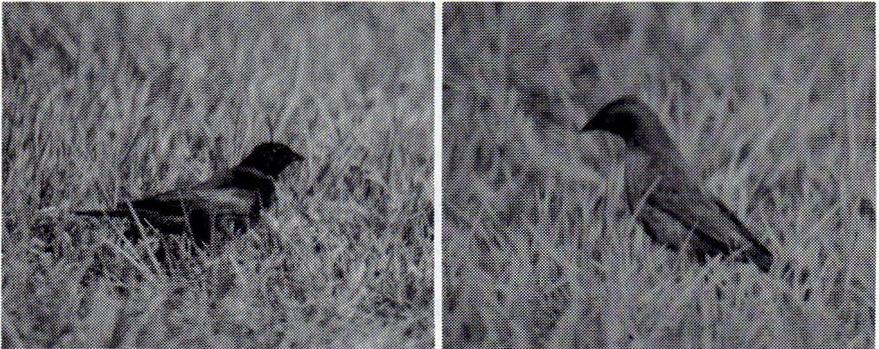


Figure 1. Male (left) and female Shiny Cowbird at Fort Morgan, 5 May 1990. (Photos by Bill Summerour)

Atherton and Brooks (1989), Ogden (1989), and Paul (1987) have documented the recent arrival of the Shiny (Glossy) Cowbird in Florida. According to Raffaele (1983), this South American species expanded northward through the Lesser Antilles and by 1955 had reached Puerto Rico. Nest parasitism by this cowbird has contributed to the decline of Puerto Rico's Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) and other island endemics. The Shiny Cowbird continued to expand northward, reaching southern Florida in 1985 (Smith and Sprunt, 1987) and Jacksonville, in northern Florida, in 1988 (Atherton and Brooks, 1989). The species was first observed in Alabama by the author on 25 April 1990. Because the Shiny Cowbird is a new species for the state, the details of the record are presented in this paper.

From 5:40 PM to 6 PM on 25 April 1990, a male all black cowbird was observed by the author through the tinted glass of the office window on a feeder tray at the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge office west of Gulf Shores. This unfamiliar bird had a very dark eye without any red which eliminated from consideration the males of several species including the two it most closely resembled – Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) and Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*). The bird was in a mixed flock containing Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*), several male and female Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*),

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and Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*). This association with the mixed blackbird flock allowed close comparisons with the three other species present.

The Shiny Cowbird appeared intermediate in body and bill size between the Brown-headed Cowbirds and the Red-winged Blackbirds. As seen through the tinted glass, the wings were black with a dull greenish-black sheen. The rest of the body was glossy black with a shiny blue iridescence. In better light on subsequent days the body appeared to have a bluish-purple iridescence. The slightly notched tail flared a little towards the tip, making it wider as well as longer than the tail of the Brown-headed Cowbird. Also, when the Shiny Cowbird fluffed up the feathers on its nape, it looked quite robust compared to the Brown-headed Cowbird. When it was not fluffed out, it appeared sleek and trim, even more streamlined than a half-sized, dark-eyed grackle. The tail was not at all keeled, and was proportionally shorter than a grackle's, or even a blackbird's tail.

While waiting turns on the feeder placed near the office window, most of the birds fed on the lawn north of the Refuge office. The male Shiny Cowbird came to the feeder a half dozen times for three to 15 seconds each visit, but flushed at any discernible movement inside the window. After it flushed the third time, I pulled out my North American field guides and found that the Shiny Cowbird was not in any of them. It is, however, well described in Raffaele's guide (1983) and by Smith and Sprunt (1987).

Before consulting these references, I had requested assistance from Greg Jackson and Bill Milmore in identifying the bird. The Shiny Cowbird sighting was also verified by other observers. At 7 AM, 26 April 1990, Gene Fleming and Paul Blevins observed four males and two females near the museum at Fort Morgan, Alabama. Bob Duncan, Bill Milmore and Owen Fang also confirmed the sighting. Six males and four females were observed by the author at Fort Morgan on Saturday, 28 April. The male at the office was last seen on 30 April. At the Fort, Bob Reid reported two males and the four females still present on 9 May.

Literature Cited

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Paul, Richard T. 1987. Florida Region [Summer 1987]. *Am. Birds* 41:1428.

Raffaele, Herbert A. 1983. A Guide to the Birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. *Fondo Educativo Interamericano* p. 171.

Smith, P. William, and Alexander Sprunt IV. 1987. The Shiny Cowbird Reaches the United States. *Am. Birds* 41:370-371.

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ALABAMA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT

Greg D. Jackson

This is the first report of the new Alabama Bird Records Committee. The committee was reorganized in late 1987, and soon began the formal evaluation of Alabama rare bird reports that had not been considered during the original committee meetings held in 1983. Forty-nine documented records were appraised in 1988 and 1989. The committee has now considered all reports not previously evaluated for which we have documentation, though there are several sightings that have been in print since 1983 for which we have no detailed written information.

The committee consists of a Secretary and six members, all of whom vote on each record. Members remain on the committee for three to four years, and at least two members are replaced each year. Records are submitted by birders to the Secretary, who then sends them by mail in a "round robin" fashion to each member. If a decision is not definitely reached during that circulation, the process is repeated. If there is still no unequivocal decision, then the record is considered at a formal meeting. Such a meeting occurred in Birmingham on 10 Feb 1990, and of the 49 circulated reports, only three had to be brought forth for discussion and resolution at that time.

The initial evaluation of submitted reports is performed by each committee member without the knowledge of the opinions of the other members, and this judgement is done as objectively and impartially as possible. A record is accepted by the committee if it finally receives no more than one negative vote. This helps ensure that few poorly docu-