

## SHINY COWBIRDS IN NORTHERN ALABAMA

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The Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) is a brood parasite that has been expanding its range from South America into North America via the West Indies (Lowther and Post 1999). The first record in the continental United States came from Florida in 1985 (Smith and Sprunt 1987). Since then the species has been detected as far north as Maine and as far west as Oklahoma (Grzybowski and Fazio 1991). Most records, however, have been concentrated in Florida and along the Gulf Coast (Pranty 2000). Shiny Cowbirds have been detected regularly in Baldwin and Mobile counties, Alabama, but there are no records from elsewhere in Alabama.

On 20 May 2003 at approximately 1000 hrs I saw two Shiny Cowbirds along Cheaha Scenic Drive in Cleburne County. The exact location was 1000 m southwest of the intersection of U.S. Routes 281 and 431 (DeLorme page 33, D7). The birds were both males and were drinking and bathing in a roadside puddle. Both birds were about the size of Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), but had blackish heads and slightly thinner and longer bills than do Brown-headed Cowbirds. The eyes were dark, not pale as would be the case for male Brewer's (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) or Rusty blackbirds (*E. carolinus*). The cowbirds were also too small to be Brewer's or Rusty blackbirds or the much larger and longer-tailed Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*). Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*) was eliminated as a possible identification because the birds' eyes were dark, not reddish, the plumage was blackish with no hint of the bronzy brown usually seen on Bronzed Cowbird, and there was no ruff typically seen on most Bronzed Cowbird napes. The head profile was flatter than expected for the more round-headed Brown-headed Cowbird. Tails were medium length and squared; legs dark; the rest of the plumage was black, appearing the same color as the head plumage.

I viewed the birds from a distance of about 30 m through the open window of my car. I used Bausch and Lomb Elite binoculars (8x42) to view the birds. The birds were silent.

This represents the first record of Shiny Cowbird in Alabama away from the Gulf Coast. Although there are no confirmed records of nest parasitism in Alabama, recent evidence from Georgia (Sykes and Post 2001) indicates the possibility of breeding in Alabama.

**LITERATURE CITED**

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