



GRACKLES AND COWBIRDS

Grackles

The Grackle is about 12 inches in length. The Grackle appears all black at a distance, but is actually highly iridescent, with colors varying from blue to purple to green to bronze, depending on the light. Grackles have bright yellow eyes. Female grackles are duller and somewhat smaller than male grackles.

Grackles are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal mandate. Grackles can cause a variety of bird control problems. When Grackles are in their flocking phase, thousands of these birds can literally overwhelm trees or buildings in an area.

Grackles have become one of those readily adaptable species to urbanized areas. They are intelligent birds that consistently outwit the tools utilized to scare them away. The City of San Antonio first attempted displacing roosting grackles ten years ago, by dropping firecrackers into galvanized metal trash cans placed under the trees. The birds just moved to the next tree. Next the city began using noise-making "cracker shells" fired from shotguns, with shotgun-wielding crews deployed to different parts of the city to chase grackles from tree to tree. The grackles simply moved to another location.



City of Frisco
Animal Services Division

FRISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT



Cowbirds

The brown-headed cowbird is a member of the blackbird family. The adult male is easily identified by his brown head and metallic green-black body. Female cowbirds are a pale brown with a gray-brown head. Both males and females have a length of about 7½ inches. Cowbirds are called brood parasites because they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and do not care for their own young. Their parasitic reproduction strategy is unique among the world's blackbird species.

Cowbirds evolved to follow herds of grazing animals, often covering many miles in a day. They can little afford the time to build their own nests, lay and incubate eggs, and care for the chicks. Instead, the female cowbird finds the nest of another bird, lays a single egg in it, and leaves. Cowbirds once occurred only in short-grass prairies, where they followed buffalo herds, feeding on insects stirred up by the grazing animals. Human-caused changes to the environment, including the introductions of domesticated grazing animals and cultivated fields and lawns, has greatly benefited the cowbird, helping it to spread to new territories. Today, brown-headed cowbirds occur throughout the United States.

