

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

Quiscalus mexicanus

Family: ICTERIDAE
B525

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A resident of southernmost California, breeding fairly commonly in Colorado River Valley and uncommonly at Salton Sea, Furnace Creek Ranch, and Diaz Lake, Inyo Co. Inhabits desert riparian, cropland, urban, and emergent wetland habitats, preferring areas where groves of trees are interspersed with residential plantings or farmlands. First recorded in California in 1964, and first recorded nesting in 1969. Wanderers recorded in San Francisco Bay area and other northern California locations. Appears likely to continue expanding range in California deserts (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds in open habitats or along shores of lakes or streams, mainly on ground or in shallow water. Omnivorous; eats insects, crustaceans, small fish, other small animals, carrion, grains, and fruits. Diet thought to resemble that of congener, boat-tailed grackle (Bent 1958), which eats mostly animal matter in spring and summer, and mostly plant matter in fall and winter (Martin et al. 1961). Boat-tailed grackle commonly eats eggs and nestlings of birds (Bent 1958).

Cover: Commonly uses trees and shrubs for cover. Usually roosts near or above water in trees, shrubs, thickets, or emergent vegetation. Avoids interior of dense forests.

Reproduction: Nest usually built near or above water, in a tree, shrub, cactus, thicket, or (less commonly) in emergent vegetation. Often nests near a residence or farm. Nest height varies from 0.6 to 15 m (2-50 ft) above ground (Selander and Giller 1961); usually 1.5 to 4.5 m (5-15 ft) (Terres 1980).

Water: Usually found near water, either fresh or saline; not known if drinking water is required.

Pattern: Prefers open habitats near water for foraging, and trees, shrubs, thickets, emergent vegetation for nesting and roosting.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not migratory. Rapidly expanding its range in California (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Male defends a nesting territory; several females build nests in each male's

territory, and each female defends a small territory around her nest (Selander and Giller 1961). Territories of males mapped by Kok (1972) were up to 45 m (150 ft) long, but were considerably narrower.

Reproduction: Breeding season begins in early April. A promiscuous, colonial breeder. Colonies in Texas have numbered thousands of nests; often in heron rookeries (Bent 1958). Clutch size usually 3 or 4 eggs, sometimes 5; incubation 13-14 days. Altricial young tended by female alone; leave nest at 20-23 days (Harrison 1978). Female normally breeds at 1 yr, but male does not (Selander and Giller 1961).

Niche: May pick off and eat ectoparasites from livestock. Male nestlings apparently require more food than females of equal age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Comments: Range extends eastward to southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana, where it becomes sympatric with its eastern congener, the boat-tailed grackle. Until 1976, these 2 grackles were considered conspecific. Thus, some previous literature on "boat tailed grackle" (e.g., Selander 1960, Tutor 1962, Rea 1969, Kok 1972) now pertains to great-tailed grackle.

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