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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*

The Shiny Cowbird, a South American species that has colonized the West Indies during the past 100 years (Cruz et al. 1985), was first identified in the United States in 1985, near Islamorada in the Florida Keys (Smith and Sprunt 1987). It has been blamed for the near-extinction of several Caribbean species in recent years, such as the Martinique Oriole and the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird of Puerto Rico. Thus, its arrival in Florida has been viewed with some dismay. In a few short years, Shiny Cowbirds have reached Texas, Oklahoma, and the Carolinas but only in very small numbers. There is not yet any evidence of a southward withdrawal in autumn.

Habitat. Like its cousin, the *Brown-headed Cowbird*, the Shiny Cowbird is an obligate brood parasite, laying its eggs only in the nests of other birds. In its native South America and the West Indies, this cowbird inhabits semi-arid, lowland areas. In Florida, it has been observed feeding along roadsides, on lawns, and at bird feeders.

Seasonal Occurrence.

Status. Proving that Shiny Cowbirds actually are laying eggs here is extremely difficult, because the females, juveniles, and the eggs themselves are nearly indistinguishable from those of the much more widespread *Brown-headed Cowbird*. There has been a steady growth in reports from around the state, particularly in spring, when the species seems to flow northward from its core range. The 1 reported "nesting" occurred near Homestead, where fledged juvenile Shiny Cowbirds were seen being fed by *Red-winged Blackbird*. Such a scenario is plausible because the Shiny Cowbird apparently prefers to parasitize its close relatives. However, in the West Indies, as their numbers have grown, Shiny Cowbirds have been shown to parasitize almost any species, and few species in the region have yet adapted a defense (Cruz et al., 1985)

Does the Shiny Cowbird's arrival suggest that some of Florida's native species may be threatened? Perhaps, but if so, the burgeoning *Brown-headed Cowbird* is probably a more immediate and likely threat. It is not yet known whether these 2 closely related species of cowbirds can coexist. Florida may well turn out to be the proving ground for this interesting biological question.

P. William Smith

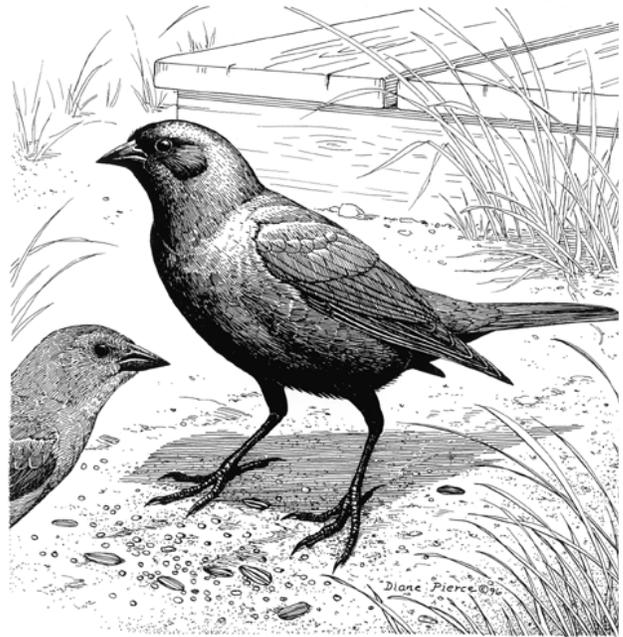


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Shiny Cowbird

