

Common Grackle

Quiscalus quiscula

Common Grackles have benefited from their close association with humans to become one of the most abundant and widespread breeding birds within Ohio. During the Atlas Project, they were found in every priority block except one heavily forested block within the Unglaciaded Plateau region. Breeding Bird Survey data indicates grackles are most numerous in the Illinoian Till Plain region with more than twice the numbers reported elsewhere in the state. However, the small number of routes on the Illinoian Till Plain may overestimate their actual relative abundance in southwestern Ohio. Nearly equal numbers are tallied during these surveys in the other physiographic regions, an indication of their uniform abundance within most counties.

Breeding Common Grackles were easy to confirm during the Atlas Project with records from 63.7% of the priority blocks. These records included observations of adults carrying food for young in 192 blocks, 177 active nests, 93 sightings of recently fledged young, and adults carrying fecal sacs in 14 blocks. The "30" code was not accepted for this species. Probable breeders were reported from 25.3% of the priority blocks with most records pertaining to territorial males, pairs in suitable habitats, and the grackle's conspicuous courtship displays. Reports of possible breeders consisted of grackles observed only in flight; their breeding status was uncertain although most were undoubtedly nesting within the priority blocks.

The association between Common Grackles and human habitations has been apparent since the 19th century. Numbers of grackles undoubtedly increased within Ohio as the state was settled, becoming common by the mid-1800s (Wheaton 1882). Their status has not appreciably changed during subsequent years. Hicks (1935) claimed they were common to abundant summer residents in every county. He later noted they were slightly less numerous along the southern margin of the unglaciaded Allegheny Plateau, becoming "rather rare" in Scioto County and uncommon to fairly common elsewhere north through Hocking, Athens, and Washington counties (Hicks 1937). As was true for most blackbirds, their numbers substantially increased throughout Ohio after 1950. This trend continued through 1975, but was reversed during the late 1970s (Robbins, C. S., et al. 1986). The severe winters of the late 1970s initiated their decline, which has apparently continued during the 1980s.

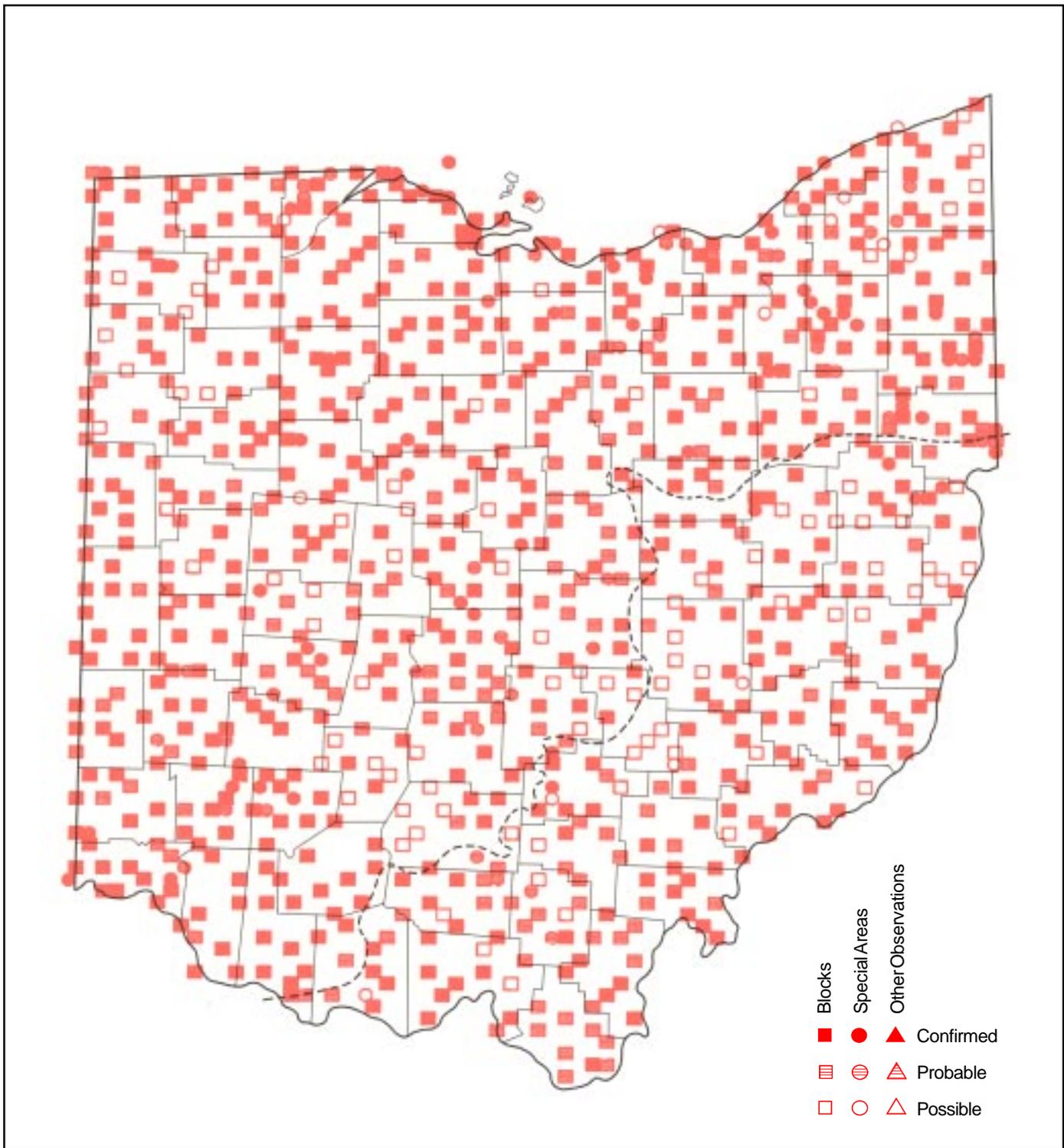
Nesting Common Grackles are most frequently found within conifers and other trees near houses. Isolated rural residences and densely packed urban housing are equally preferred by this species. They are not restricted to these habitats and will also breed within wooded riparian corridors, cattail marshes, shrub swamps, orchards, pastures and other farm fields, abandoned fields with dense brush, and rock cliffs in quarries (Campbell 1968, Trautman 1940). They are equally adaptable in their choice of nest sites. Most nests are placed at heights of 5–20 feet in shrubs and trees, although some may be as high as 50–60 feet.



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Man-made structures are frequently used for nesting, particularly bridge girders. Pairs will also nest under the eaves of houses. Unusual nesting locations include Wood Duck boxes, Purple Martin houses, and even tree cavities (Campbell 1968, Lloyd 1943).

Maxwell (1970) studied the nesting behavior of Common Grackles on South Bass Island (Ottawa County). He noted that some pair bonds were established by the first week of April and most pairs were formed by early May. Nest construction began during late March and continued through mid-May, but the pairs were not very diligent in these activities and some nests were built over a period of eight weeks. Many more nests were started than were ever used for egg laying. Nests with eggs have been reported by April 16–19 in southern and central Ohio (Trautman 1940, Lloyd 1943), but are not expected until early May along Lake Erie (Maxwell 1970). Most first clutches are produced between April 25 and May 27. Fledglings normally begin to appear by May 12–18 and most first broods fledge by mid-June. Renesting attempts are frequent and some pairs could raise two broods. The latest published egg date is only June 15 (Trautman 1940), and young grackles from these late broods normally fledge by mid-July. However, fledglings have been reported through August 3 (Peterjohn 1989a), indicating some eggs may not hatch until late June or early July.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	95	100.0	12.5	89.0
Till Plain	271	271	100.0	35.5	97.4
Ill. Till Plain	46	46	100.0	6.0	238.8
Glaciated Plateau	140	140	100.0	18.4	101.2
Unglaciated Plateau	212	211	99.5	27.7	70.3

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	763	99.9%
Confirmed	486	63.7%
Probable	193	25.3%
Possible	84	11.0%