

863-01-1996

A BIG, BIG GRACKLE

Arlene Koch

1996

As I was walking past the sliding glass door around 11:30 a.m. on May 16, I glanced out at my feeders and pulled up short. Under the flat, open one was the biggest grackle that I've ever seen in my yard.

To be perfectly honest, at first I thought it was a skinny crow because there had a lot of them helping themselves to my bird feed. By my brain quickly kicked in as I looked at the long, thin torso and the (how else do you describe it?) keel-shaped tail. The eye was dark, or at least what I would describe as darkish, and its head and body were an iridescent blue/black. I've seen thousands of common grackles both on my own property and other places and they appear either purplish or greenish/blue and bronze.

What really made me think that I was most likely looking at a boat-tailed grackle was the sheer size of the bird. The feeder under which it was standing measures 18 in. across and this bird was almost equal in size to it. None of the common grackles has ever come close to being that big, although some of them are certainly bigger than others.

I grabbed for my binoculars to get a closer look even though the bird was only about 20 feet away but, as I was putting them to my eyes, it took off. I ran out onto the deck and watched as it flew almost directly east up the valley, out of sight. Obviously, for the next few days every time a grackle landed anywhere close to the feeding area I checked it over twice, but I never again saw this bird.

I'm convinced that what I saw was a boat-tailed grackle although I have no way of proving it. In the big open farm valley where I live I attract the Icterid species, having previously had, along with the common ones, yellow-headed blackbirds twice, Brewer's blackbirds four times, and rusty blackbirds frequently. Our property lies at the extreme eastern end of the state, almost equidistant between the north and south borders, 2 miles in from the Delaware River.

I put the boat-tailed grackle on my PA, Northampton County, and back yard lists even though no one else saw it and it probably won't be officially recognized. But I'm hoping that maybe another will come through next year and maybe I'll finally have a camera at the ready like everyone keeps telling me to do. And I'm also hoping that some day I'll win the lottery.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Boat-tailed Grackle (Quiscalus major)**

Date of Sighting: **16 May 1996 to 16 May 1996**

Location: **WILLIAMS TWP**

County: **NORTHAMPTON**

Observer(s): **Arlene Koch**

Date of Submission: **1996**

Submitted by: **Arlene Koch**

Written Description: **YES** Photo: **NO** Specimen: **NO**

Recording: **NONE**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas				X				
N. Pulcinella				X				
E. Kwater						X		
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams				X				
P. Schwalbe				X				
S. Feldstein						X		
TOTALS			1	4		2		
DECISION				X				

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J. C. Haas

Date:

2-22-97