



# MONTEREY NEWS



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## Grackles

The best way to tell if the unwanted grackles are invading your backyard is to check on flocks of blackbirds and starlings already there making a nuisance of themselves. The tallest with the longest tails among them might turn out to be grackles with their shiny purple heads in sharp contrast with their bronze iridescent bodies. In New England the grackles have a bronze hue. In the Southeast the grackles are darker green, with purplish bellies, sometimes referred to as "purple grackles."

In my illustration, mated grackles usually look for seeds scattered on the ground such that when they're in a mixed flock it might look like a free-for-all. They often try to steal food from robins as well as many other smaller birds. They have already been seen at my place killing an adult house sparrow and have a reputation of being bullies around groups of other smaller birds. Occasionally they will make a nest in the lower level of the osprey wooden towers along the shoreline of Fairhaven.

Grackles produce clutches of up to seven chicks. Both of the parents feed their fledglings insects, beetle grubs, grasshoppers, millipedes, spiders, min-



nnows, and tadpoles. They also are fed quantities of ants by their parents. The formic acids in the ants help them get rid of crawling parasites infect- George Emmons, who turns ninety-six in August, is still creating! ing their inner plumage. The fledglings are soon enough ready to forage for themselves in preparation for the seasonal migration down South at the end of summer.

During migration grackles forage together and roost in large communal flocks with several different species of other blackbirds and these gatherings can number many hundreds of individuals. The flocks build in size in prepara-

tion for the coming of winter weather. During the spring migration they pass over large corn fields and are a number one threat to growing corn. They can have a milliondollar impact on agriculture and it's much appreciated when they move on.

The oldest grackle recorded was a solitary male kept alive until it was at least twenty-one years old, when it was unfortunately killed by a raptor. Now, with climate change, the presence of grackles, along with many other migratory species, cannot be reasonably predicted.

— George B. Emmons