

THE GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

The Great-tailed Grackle has become a very common sight around Fort Worth, but I remember that it was not always so. In fact I rarely saw these birds at all on the west side of town where I grew up in the 1950's. This close relative of the Boat-tailed Grackle is a tropical bird which in the last thirty or forty years has spread across the state from its home in the warmer climates of south Texas and Mexico. At a distance it differs in appearance from the less common Boat-tail in that it is considerably larger in size and generally a more bluish and purple in color. It is regarded as an unpopular bird by most of my friends because of its noisiness and aggressive behavior. They also range farther from water than do their smaller cousins, but like the Boat-tails, they prefer evergreen trees for roosting and for making their nests. I have most often seen them in cedars or evergreen oaks, and I have a private theory that these birds resort to evergreen trees, because they are immigrants from tropical regions where most of the trees retain their leaves for the entire year. After they migrated north into colder climes where the majority of the trees lose their leaves in Autumn these grackles have naturally tended to flock to areas which remain green in Winter as in their tropical homeland. They continue to prefer these trees even after the general vegetation is renewed in Spring.

Though, as I have said, the Great-tailed Grackle is not a popular bird here, Scott and I have always thought that they were an exceptional species, gifted with more intelligence and certainly with more personality than most other Texas birds their size. My brother and I have depicted three glossy males and a brown female in a Sweetgum tree as part of a flock descending on a harvested cornfield. The upper bird is shown in a pose that is characteristic of the males of this species when other males are present. Though this challenging or greeting posture is most evident as part of their Spring mating behavior, I have seen male Great-tails perform it at all times of the year. They are very inquisitive and will on occasion

approach quite close to inspect you, but should you attempt to approach them, they become wary and will not allow you to venture near. I hope we have caught in our painting a sense of this bird's remarkable personality, its boldness and intelligence, its cunning and wide-eyed alertness.

SWG