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#### North Carolina's First Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*)

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On 16 November 1989 a single male Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) was observed near Aurora, Beaufort County, N. C. It was first discovered in a flock of approximately 45 Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) that were feeding on a roadside lawn near the entrance to Texas-Gulf Inc. It was relatively easy to pick out as the darkest bird in the flock. Using 8 x 32 binoculars, from a distance of forty feet, it was obvious the bird lacked a brown head (Figure 1). The bird was about the size of adjacent Brown-headed Cowbirds but appeared slimmer and slightly longer tailed. Its back was dark iridescent purple turning darker and less iridescent on the head. The wings and tail were glossy blue-green. Observations with a 20x telescope revealed a dark

brown eye, narrower, more pointed bill, and slightly flatter forehead (see cover photo) compared to Brown-headed Cowbirds.



Figure 1. Shiny Cowbird feeding with Brown-headed Cowbirds and House Sparrows near Aurora, Beaufort Co., N.C. Note the completely dark head in comparison with male Brown-headed Cowbirds. Photo by S. Cooper, 16 November 1989.

All field marks indicate that the bird was a male Shiny Cowbird (DeSchauensee, 1970; Dunning, 1982; Hilty and Brown, 1986; Smith and Sprunt, 1987). The lack of a "ruffled neck", thick bill, and red eye separated this bird from a Bronzed Cowbird (*Molothrus aeneus*). Slight structural differences and pure colors indicate that this bird was not an aberrant Brown-headed Cowbird.

The bird was first observed at 0915 h by Alexander P. Smith, Stephanie C. Petter and myself. An attempt to relocate the bird, or the cowbird flock, was unsuccessful at 0945 h. At noon the bird was photographed with a 200 mm lens near the original location with a large mixed flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds, House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*).

The bird was always associated with other cowbirds but seemed less "flighty" and more tolerant to disturbances (e.g. traffic and people). Occasionally the bird would cock its tail up with head back and then run from one section of the flock to another (see cover photo).

This is the first record of this species from North Carolina. The expansion of the Shiny Cowbird's range has spread predictably through the Caribbean and more recently into the southeastern United States (Figure 2). Between 1955 and 1977 this species advanced through the Greater Antilles at a rate of 30.6 km (19 miles) per year (Post and Wiley, 1977). Since reaching the United States in 1985, it has spread over 1200 km (700 miles) during four years. Its

occurrence in the United States is irregular, but increasing reports and observations of larger flocks suggest this bird will only become more established with time.

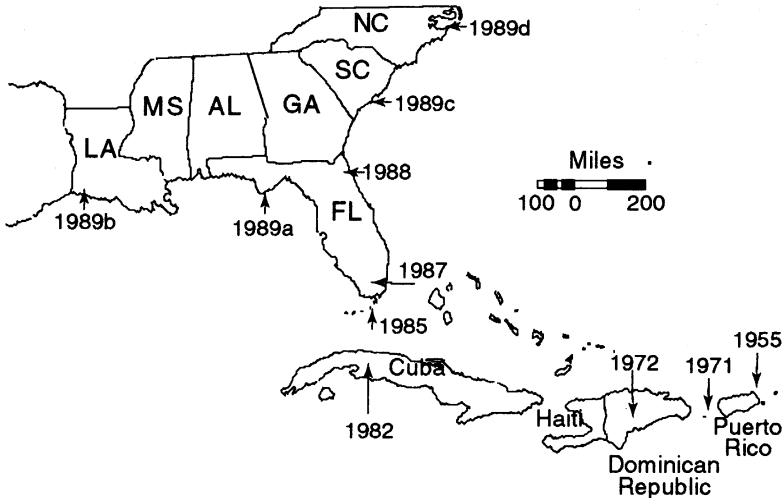


Figure 2. Range expansion of the Shiny Cowbird through the Greater Antilles and southeast North America. 1955: Puerto Rico (Grayce, 1957); 1971: Mona Island (Bond, 1973); 1972: Dominican Republic (Bond, 1973); 1982: north coast of Cuba (Bond, 1984); 1985: Florida Keys (Smith and Sprunt, 1987); 1987: mainland south Florida (Smith and Sprunt, 1987); 1988: Duval Co., FL (Am. Birds 42:1281); 1989a: Calhoun Col, FL (Am. Birds 43:494); 1989b: Cameron, LA (Am. Birds 43:494); 1989c: Charleston Co., SC (Post, pers. comm., 1990); 1989d: Beaufort Co., NC (this report).

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## **Destruction of a Pine Warbler Brood by an Adult Cowbird**

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Many accounts of the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) mention its habit of often removing eggs from the nest of its host (Hann, 1941; Friedmann, 1963). It is also well known that nestling cowbirds often oust their nestmates, although this behavior is generally thought to be unintentional (Bent, 1958). Few instances of adult cowbirds ejecting or otherwise injuring the hatched young of their hosts have been reported. Tate (1967) observed a female cowbird carrying away and dropping one of three nestling Black-throated Green Warblers (*Dendroica virens*) from a nest which also contained a nestling cowbird. Bonwell (1895) reported a female cowbird feeding a young cowbird in a nest of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) and pecking the young grosbeaks on the head if they begged for food. We here report an adult cowbird's deliberate ejection of a warbler brood from a nest that apparently contained no cowbird nestling.

On 29 April 1990, at 1104 h, while walking through Bean Patch Savannah in the Green Swamp Ecological Preserve (N. C. Nature Conservancy property off NC 211, ca. 9.7 km NNW Supply, Brunswick County, North Carolina), we noticed a small object fall to the ground beneath a large longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*). Upon investigation we saw that the object was a nestling bird. Approximately 9-12 m up in the tree was a small nest, and at the nest was an adult female cowbird, holding in her bill another nestling, which she pulled from the nest and dropped to the ground. Subsequently a third nestling was dropped, and a fourth, and apparently final nestling was pulled from the nest and deposited on the limb beside the nest. The cowbird then immediately flew from the nest and out of sight at 1106 h, the entire procedure having taken approximately 2 min. The nestling on the limb floundered there for approximately 1 min., clutching the limb with one foot before dropping to the ground. All four young were alive, though apparently injured. One was nearly dead and bleeding on its head and wing from lacerations presumably inflicted by the cowbird's bill. A search of the ground failed to reveal more than four nestlings. Believing them to be Pine Warblers (*Dendroica pinus*), but not certain at that point, we collected the young birds and waited a short distance away for the parents to return. When, after several minutes, no other birds had come near the nest, we left the site. The young warblers, later deposited in the