

Common Grackle

Common Grackle

Appearance

Glossy blackbird with a long tail. They are bigger than a blackbird, but smaller than a crow. They have a heavy, curved bill with adults having a menacing yellow eye. Common Grackles appear black from a distance, but up close their glossy purple heads contrast with bronzy-iridescent bodies. Females are slightly less glossy than males.



Male Common Grackle



Female Common Grackle

Common Grackle

Appearance

Young birds are dark brown with a dark eye.



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Fledgling Common Grackle

Common Grackle

Sounds

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home>

SONGS

Common Grackles make a variety of squeaks, whistles, and croaks. The typical song, made by both males and females, is a guttural *readle-eak* accompanied by high-pitched, clear whistles. It lasts just less than a second and is often described as sounding like a rusty gate.

CALLS

Males and females make a very short, harsh *chaa* or *chitip* call when alarmed, taking flight, or approaching other grackles. Males make a distinctive, short, nasal call while perching in a nesting colony.

Listen to the songs and calls at:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Grackle/sounds

Common Grackle

Diet

The Common Grackle is primarily a seed eater, but will eat insects and animals during summer, such as beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, spiders, crustaceans, mollusks, fish, frogs, salamanders, mice, and other birds.

They will eat agricultural products such as corn or rice and have been known to eat garbage.



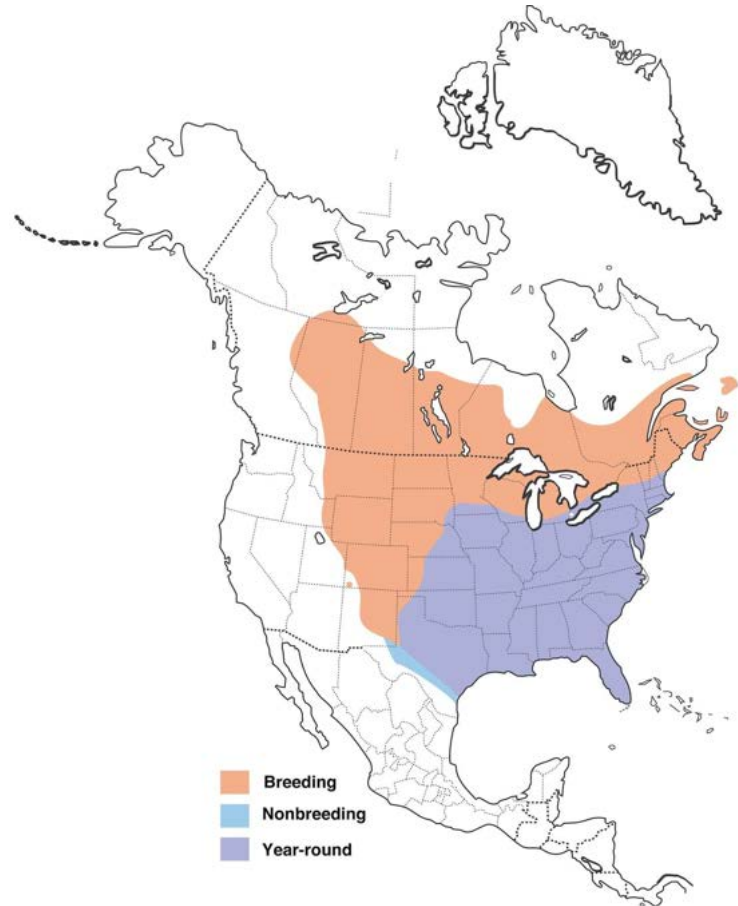
Common Grackle with a slug.

Common Grackle

Range

The Common Grackle is a year-round resident through much of the Eastern United States, including DuPage County. If it does migrate, it is not far. Its range does overlap with other grackle species such as the Boat-tailed Grackle along the Atlantic seaboard, and Great-tailed Grackle in Oklahoma and Texas. Although the Common Grackle is one of the most widespread bird species in North America, the [Partners in Flight 2016 Landbird Conservation Plan](#) notes that its numbers have declined by more than 50 percent in the United States and Canada.¹ Numbers have likely declined as they are viewed as agricultural pests, driving the use of lethal control measures.

¹American Bird Conservancy



Map: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Grackle/maps-range

DuPage Birding Club, 2020

Common Grackle

Habitat

The Common Grackle can be seen throughout human landscapes, including agricultural fields, parks, and backyards. Natural habitats are wide and varied including along forest edges, swamps, marshes, and grasslands. They are not found in large, unbroken tracts of forest. Grackles will nest in open trees, and forage along the ground.



A Common Grackle along a forest edge.



A Common Grackle in a marsh.



A Common Grackle in a suburban yard habitat, which is common in DuPage County.

Common Grackle

Behavior

The Grackle's flight line is direct and straight.



Common Grackle Behavior

Common Grackles will flock with other blackbirds, cowbirds, and starlings. They will also roost high in trees, but forage along the ground.



A Common Grackle with Brown-headed Cowbirds and Red-winged Blackbirds, and a couple of chipmunks.



A Common Grackle with European Starlings and Brown-headed Cowbirds.

Common Grackle

Behavior

Common Grackles are noisy and gregarious birds.

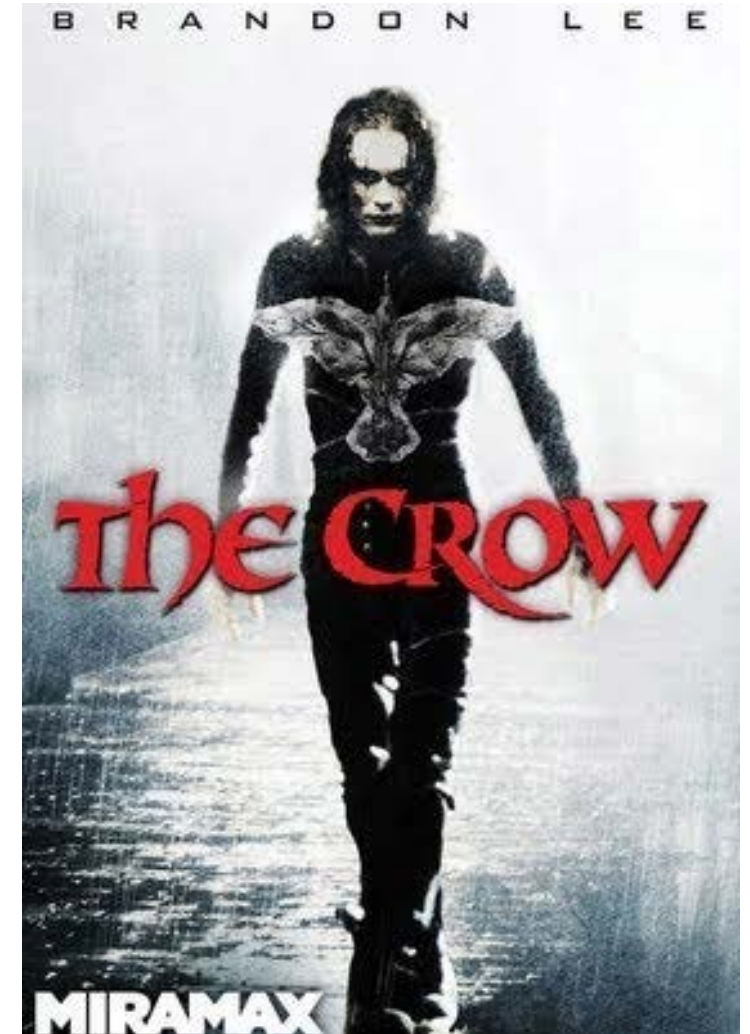
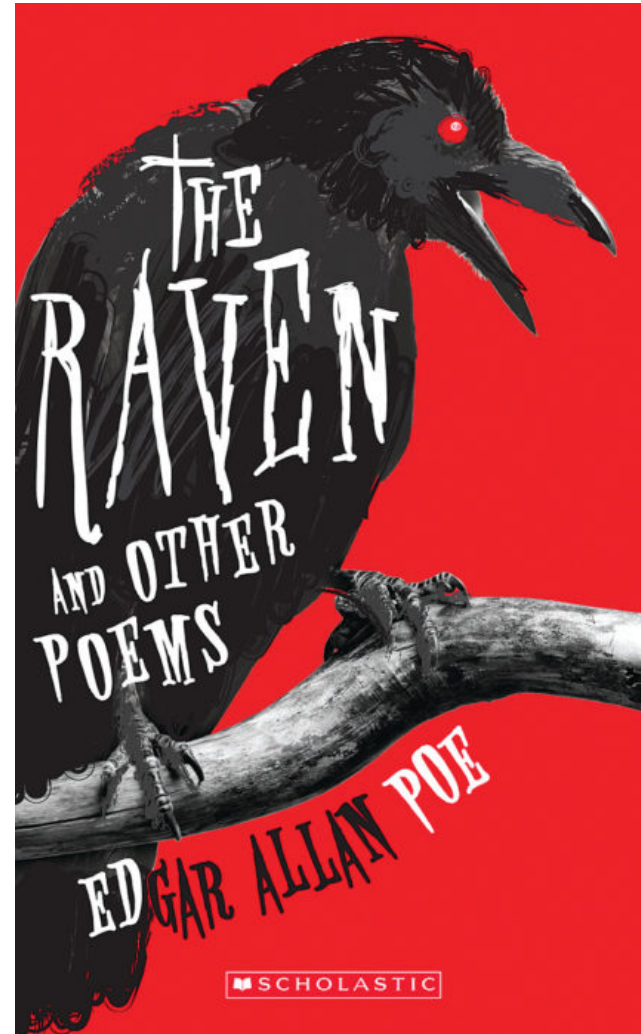


Common Grackle Literature/Arts

Unfortunately, the Common Grackle is a bird that nobody loves. Farmers view them as a pest, while others view them as a bully.

But even with this unwarranted fierce or evil aura, they have not featured heavily in literature or the arts over the years.

Authors, artists, and film directors have gravitated towards the use of Ravens and Crows, and not the Grackle as a harbinger of something dark and nefarious.



Where is *The Grackle*?

Common Grackle Feeders

Grackles are fairly frequent visitors to feeders.
Common Grackles generally are indiscriminate eaters.
They will eat sunflower seeds, safflower, cracked corn, suet, fruit, millet, peanuts, oats, and milo.



Common Grackles will come to birdseed hoppers and platforms.
It's also good to spread seed or feed on the ground as they seem to prefer to eat on the ground.



Common Grackles will bully other birds at feeders

Common Grackle

Name

Common name

Common Grackle

Common because the Common Grackle is widespread.

Grackle is an eighteenth-century Anglicization of the Latin *graculus*, which was the word for “Jackdaw,” a member of the crow family common through the Old World.



Scientific name

Quiscalus quiscula

Quiscalus quiscula:

Quiscalus and *quiscula* are variants of the same indeterminate word: From New Latin for *quis*, meaning “who,” and *qualis*, “of what kind.”

The Common Grackle was first described in 1758 by Carl Linnaeus in the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae*, as *Gracula quiscula*. It was later assigned to the genus *Quiscalus* by French ornithologist Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot in his 1816 *Dictionnaire d'histoire naturelle*.

