

SPECIES OF THE MONTH**COMMON GRACKLE****OCTOBER 2026**

Three grackle (*Quiscalus*) species are found in North America: The Common (*Q. quiscula*), Boat-tailed (*Q. major*), and Great-tailed Grackles (*Q. mexicanus*). The 3 species are characterized by their dark plumage, long tail, and complex and noisy vocalizations, and they are often found in flocks.

The 2 species that have been reported in Arizona are the Common and Great-tailed Grackles, which have a wide and partially overlapping breeding distribution. Common Grackles nest for the most part east of the Rocky Mountains, from the Northwest Territories of Canada to the East Coast of the United States, and northern and western populations are migratory. In contrast, the Great-tailed Grackle's range does not extend north to Canada but consists of more southern regions, from Texas to the West Coast, and south into Mexico and Central America. Most birds are resident, with those at the northern limit of the species' range being partial migrants. The 2 species are locally common to abundant. They use various habitats that include agricultural areas and forest edges. Having adapted well to human presence, they are also commonly found in residential and urban environments. The Boat-tailed Grackle is restricted to salt marshes along the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico.



Common Grackle, Keillor Park, Cochise County, 13 February 2021. Photo by Scott Olmstead

The American Ornithologists Union recognized 3 Common Grackle subspecies (*Q. quiscula quiscula*, *stonei*, and *versicolor*). Males of all the subspecies can be distinguished from males of other grackle species and from male Brewer's Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) by the characteristic bronzy sheen on the back and wings. This coloration varies among the 3 subspecies, with the interior form (*Q. q. versicolor*), which is most likely to be seen in Arizona, showing the most bronze color. Adult male Great-tailed and Common Grackles are also distinguished by body and bill sizes (smaller in Common than Great-tailed Grackles). Adult female Great-tailed Grackles are brown below and display a pale eyebrow. In contrast, adult female Common Grackles are uniformly dark, and their plumage is rather similar to that of conspecific males. Juvenile Common Grackles are overall brownish like female Brewer's Blackbirds but have longer, heavier bills and longer tails.

More than 30 Common Grackles have been reported in Arizona, and the Arizona Bird Committee removed it from its review list in 2020. The species is a casual visitor to the state occurring mostly in the spring and fall, with each season accounting for 40% of the records. Reports are from Apache, Coconino, Cochise, Maricopa, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, and Yuma counties.

Populations of the interior Common Grackle have undergone a significant and apparently continuing westward expansion during the 20th century. This expansion suggests the possibility that the species may start breeding in several western states including Arizona.