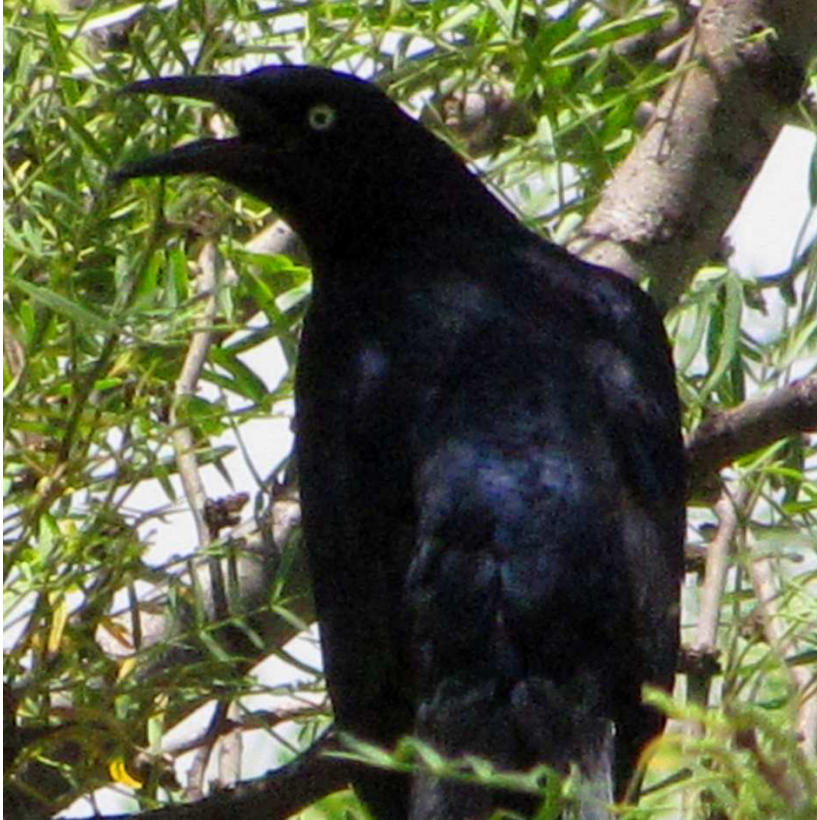


This week on the Llano Estacado

August 24– 28,2009



Great-tailed Grackles visit every school in town. They travel in groups of 5-15, except when they are headed to their roost sites in the evening, when hundreds or thousands gather together. The grackles moved here in 1980, after their original habitat was destroyed (marshes along the edge of the ocean.) They eat other bird's eggs, and almost anything else moist that they find, as well as seeds!

Despite their unsavory reputation, they are fascinating birds to watch. Males will parade in front of each other, with wings spread and tail fanned, with their beaks pointed in the air, all the while screeching. In the mating season, the females respond to similar behavior by crouching low and quivering their entire body.

Like other species of birds, they will land in an ant nest and allow the ants to crawl over their body to pick the eggs and nits of feather lice off of them. They will also bask in the sun during the winter, slowly tilting their bodies to catch all of the sun's rays. In the summer, they will find shade and stand with their mouths open (a behavior called gaping). Birds do not sweat, so they gape and flutter their throat muscles to move air quickly out of their body.

Challenge for teachers and students;

Discover what the grackles eat at your school. Email us at bwilliams@sibleynaturecenter.org with your discoveries!