

## FISHING BEHAVIOR OF THE CARIB GRACKLE (*QUISCALUS LUGUBRIS*) IN VENEZUELA

Adriana Rodríguez-Ferraro

Departamento de Estudios Ambientales, Apdo. 89.000, Valle de Sartenejas,  
 Caracas 1080-A, Venezuela. *E-mail*: rodrigueza@usb.ve

**Comportamiento de pesca del Tordito (*Quiscalus lugubris*) en Venezuela.**

**Key words:** Carib Grackle, fishing, Passeriformes, *Quiscalus lugubris*, Venezuela.

**Handling editor:** Kaspar Delhey; **Receipt:** 10 March 2015; **First decision:** 8 May 2015;  
**Final acceptance:** 17 August 2015.

Fish consumption by passerine birds in the Neotropics has been reported for 17 species within 8 families, mainly based on the analysis of stomach contents (Lopes *et al.* 2005 and references therein). However, these studies lack data on the strategies used by birds to obtain fish, which can be obtained already dead or are actively captured by fishing. Fishing within Passeriformes is uncommon and this behavior has been reported for a few Neotropical species, which seem to use fish as a food source opportunistically. These birds belong to five families, including two furnarids (*Furnarius leucopus cinnamomeus*, *Cinclodes taczanowskii*; Barrio & Valqui 2005), five tyrant flycatchers (*Pitangus sulphuratus*, *Tyrannus dominicensis*, *Sayornis nigricans*, *S. phoebe*, *Pyrocephalus rubinus*; Binford 1957, Lawson 1975, Lefebvre & Spahn 1987, Andrews & Sullivan 1996, Lopes *et al.* 2005, Lorenz & New 2010), American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*; Kimball

1944, Bayer 1980), Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*; Hulse & Atkeson 1953), and two species of grackles. Fishing has been extensively described for the Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) in North America (Pellet 1926, Beeton & Wells 1957, Follet 1957, Darden 1974, Zottoli 1976, Jaramillo & Burke 1999), and there are some records for the Great-tailed Grackle (*Q. mexicanus*) in Costa Rica (Skutch 1996). Although fish has been also reported as part of the diet of the Boat-tailed Grackle (*Q. major*), fishing behavior has not been described yet for this species (Jaramillo & Burke 1999). Here, I present the first record of fishing behavior in another grackle, the Carib Grackle (*Q. lugubris*).

The distribution of the Carib Grackle includes the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, Tobago, and northern South America, ranging from the eastern llanos in Colombia through most of northern Venezuela and the Guianas

to northeastern Brazil (Jaramillo & Burke 1999). In Venezuela, the Carib Grackle is a common species, inhabiting open areas such as llanos, agricultural lands, mangroves, forest edges, urban areas, and disturbed areas along the coast (Hilty 2003). Even though the Carib Grackle is an opportunistic and omnivorous species feeding on seeds, fruits, arthropods, and small vertebrates, such as lizards and bird nestlings (Fraga 2011), fish was not previously reported as part of its diet. On 17 January 2015 at 07:25 h, I observed a group of nine Carib Grackles fishing in a mangrove area dominated by low (1–3 m height) Red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) at Punta Brava (10°47'50.7"N-68°18'22.9"W), within Morrocoy National Park in Falcón state, northwestern Venezuela. The group of grackles was composed by three males and six females. The first individual I saw fishing was a female, which, while perched on mangrove roots above water surface, introduced her beak in the water and captured three unidentified small fishes (2–3 cm long) that were eaten very quickly. This female repeated this behavior for about 15 min, moving among mangrove roots. All the males in the group and two additional females were also observed fishing using a similar strategy as the first female. During fishing the birds' bodies and wings never touched the water. It was evident that grackles were catching live fish since no dead ones were floating on the water surface, and groups of small fishes were frequently observed near water surface at the site. The group of grackles engaged in fishing behavior during approximately 40 min, and individuals were successful in most of the fishing attempts, then they flew away and were not observed again in the same area during the rest of that day. After catching a fish, grackles either swallowed the fish whole or placed it on mangrove tree roots and ate pieces. Common Grackles have been reported to beat fish against rocks or cement structures

(Pellet 1926), but this behaviour was not observed in Carib Grackles.

Although I did not evaluate fish abundance, these qualitative observations may indicate that fish could be an easily available food item for Carib Grackles in mangrove areas. Populations of Common Grackles living in aquatic environments were observed foraging on fish regularly, and fish may constitute an important part of their diet (Pellet 1926). Additional studies and observations are needed to elucidate the frequency of fishing behavior in populations of the Carib Grackle inhabiting wetlands, as well as the relative importance of fish in its diet.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to Kaspar Delhey and Simon Ducatez for providing valuable suggestions on earlier versions of this manuscript, and for sharing relevant articles to improve it.

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