

Bird identification and behavior

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The suspects

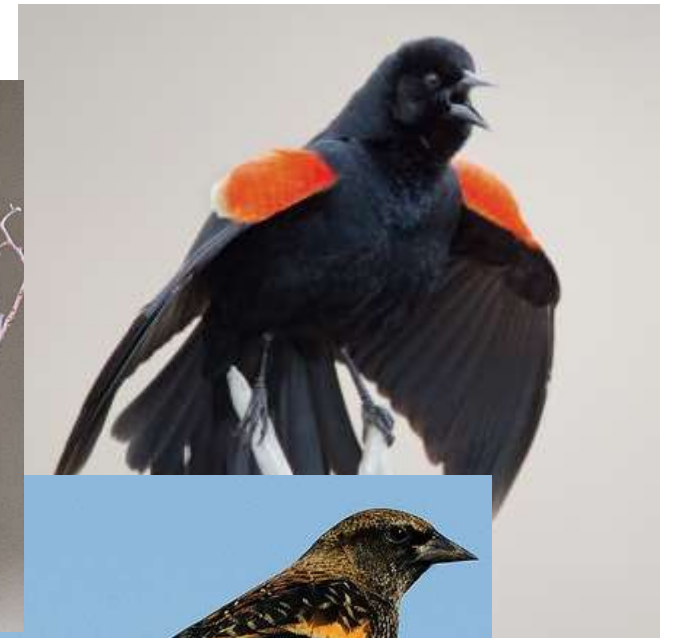
- Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
 - Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)
 - Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)
 - Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)
 - Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)
- European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)
- Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)
- American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

Factors to consider

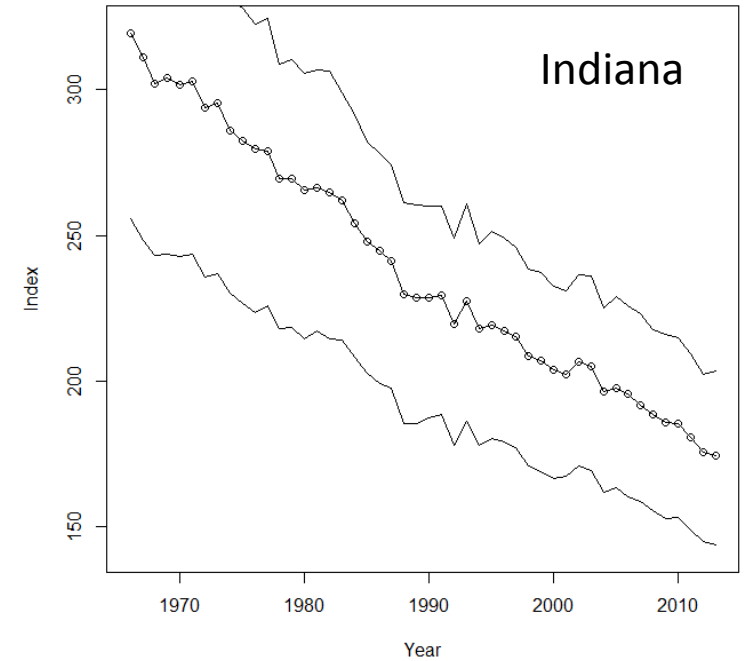
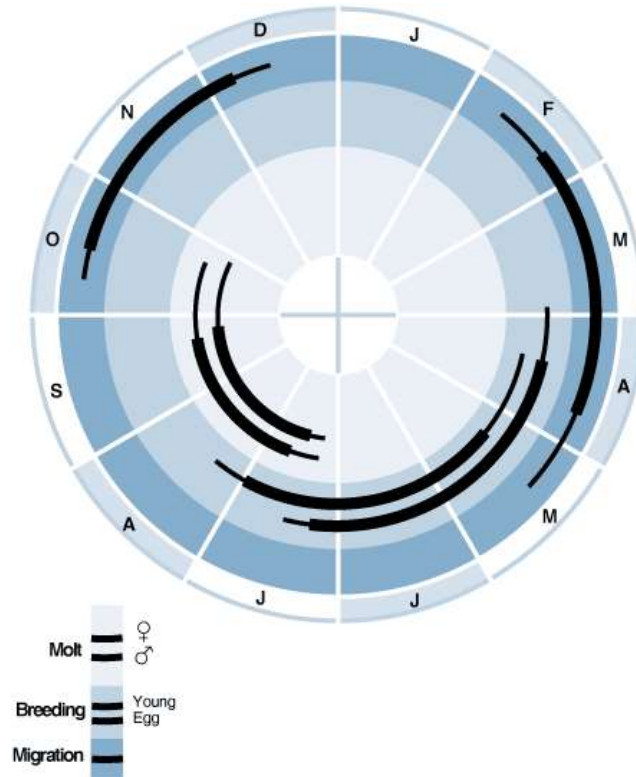
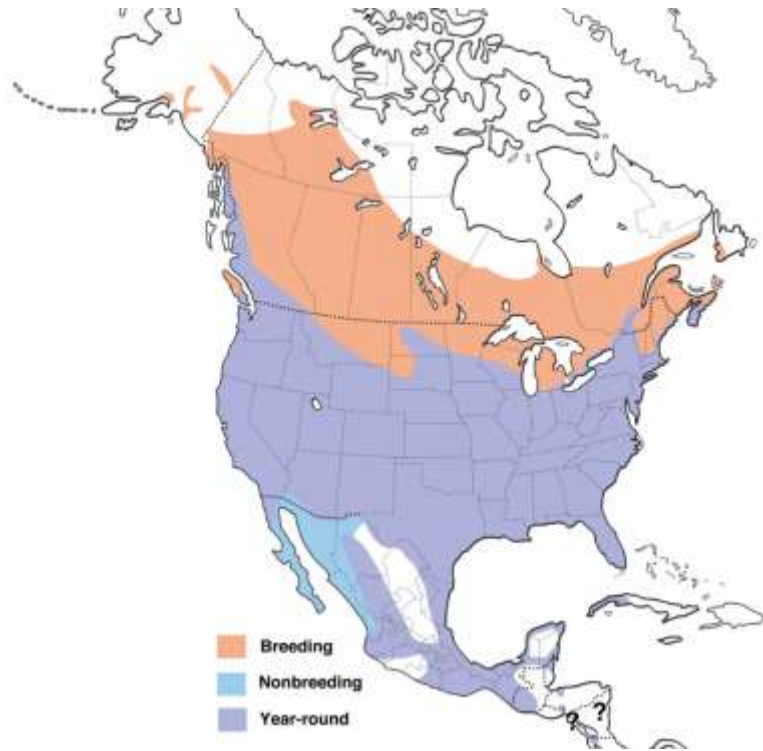
- Diet
- Seasonal movements
- Behavior
- Legal status

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

- Adult males have red wing patches bordered in yellow
 - 1st yr males mottled
 - Basic plumage, edged in buff
- Females are mottled brown above, heavily streaked below, with prominent white eyebrow stripe



Red-winged Blackbird



Red-winged blackbird

- Diet mostly insects during the nesting season
- Grain and weed seeds in the late summer through winter
- Damage to corn (milk stage and later), sunflower, sorghum, oats, rice
- In Ohio, plant matter 92.4%, primarily corn (70.8%); animal matter 7.6%, primarily arthropods (7.5%) ($n = 99$ birds collected Aug-Oct; [Williams and Jackson 1981](#))
- Large roosts (except during nesting); damage often increases in closer fields

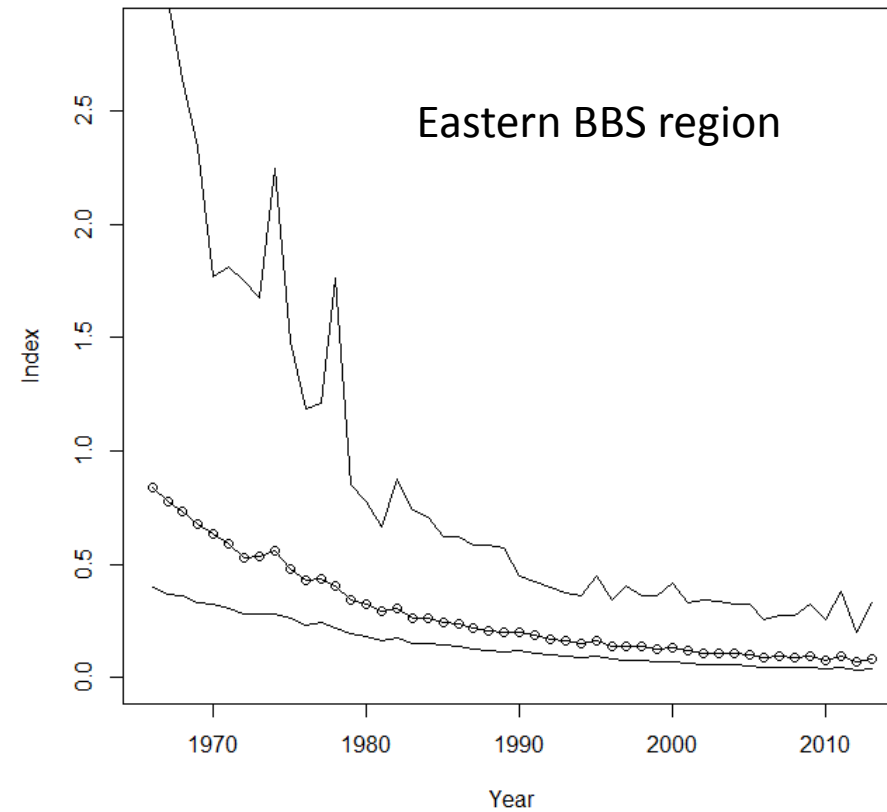
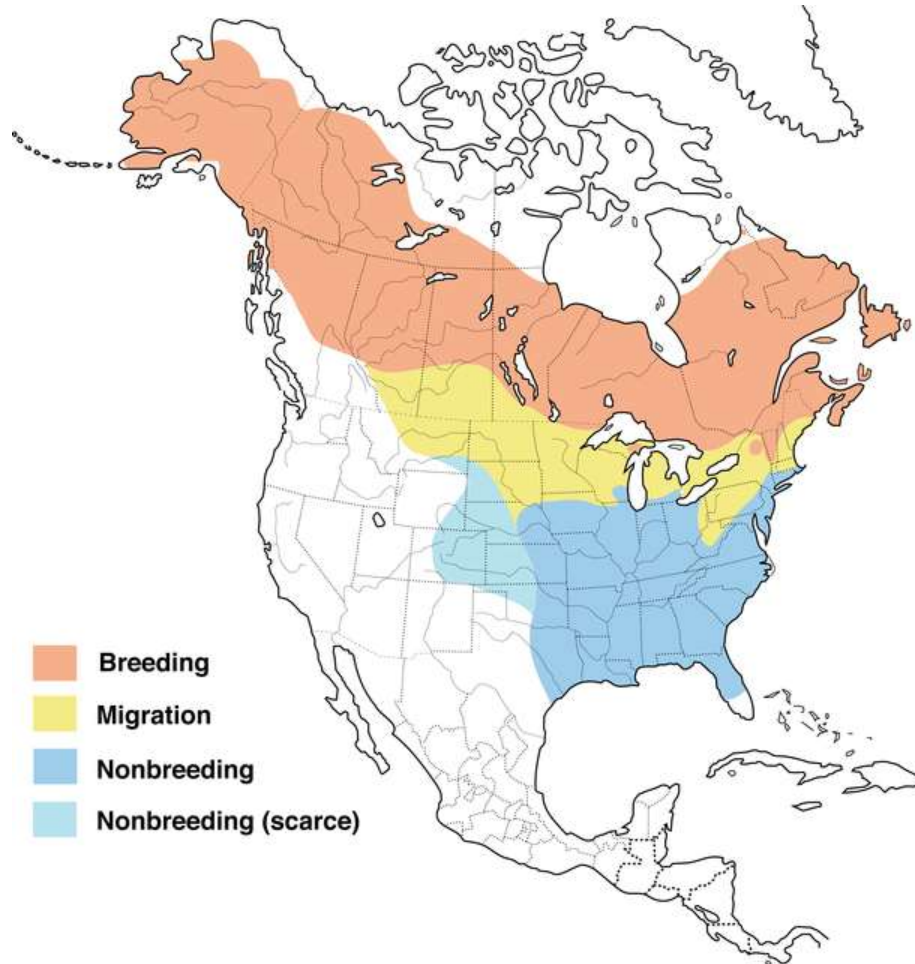


Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)

- Males uniformly black and glossy above
 - Basic plumage rusty brown crown and nape; buffed edges on throat, breast and sides
- Females slate gray and darker above (not pictured)
 - Basic plumage, pale buff eyebrow stripe
- Juveniles have wider buff edges



Rusty Blackbird



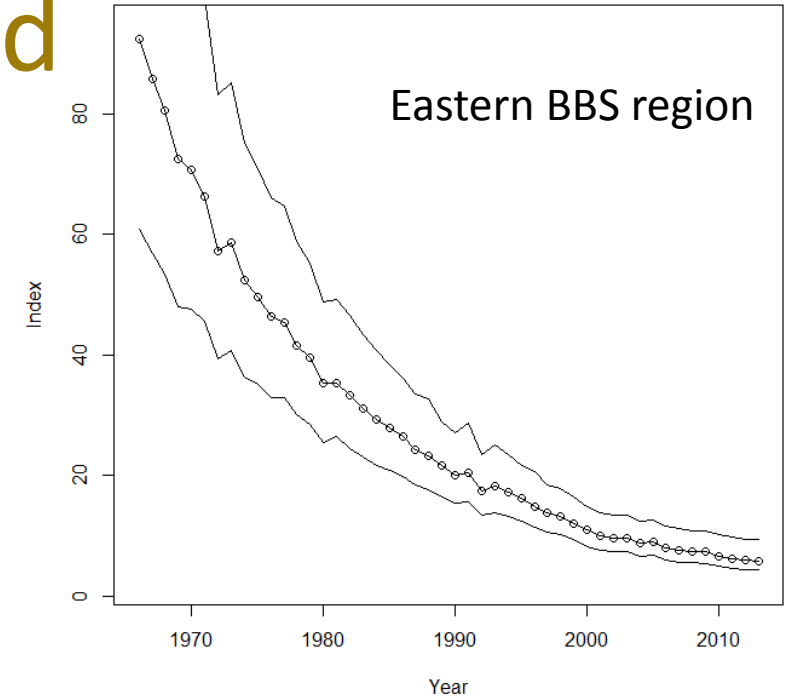
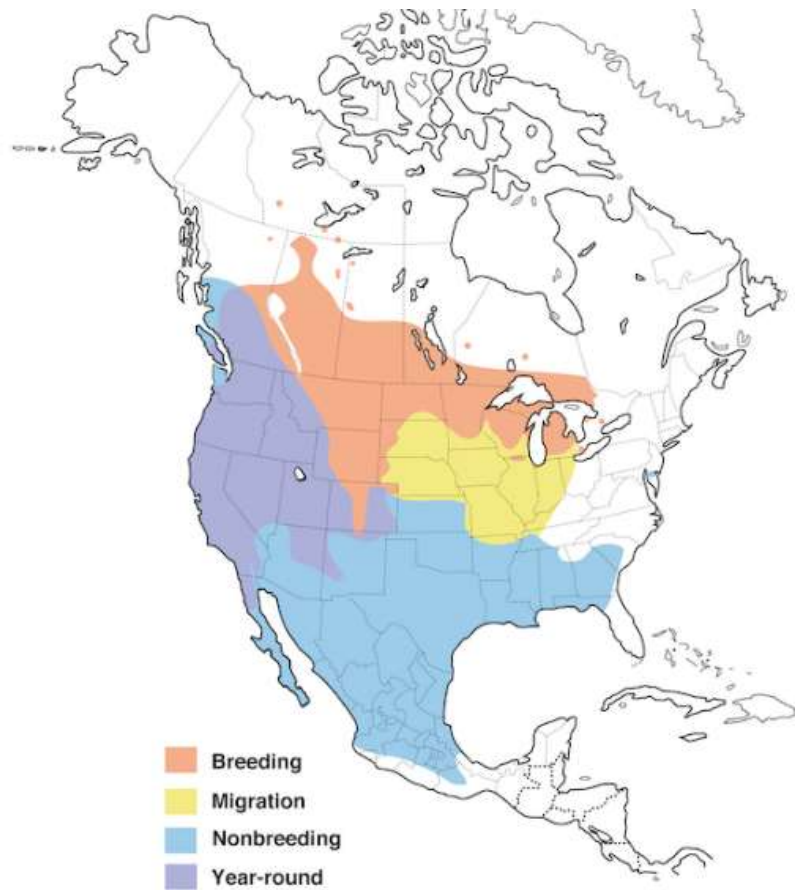
Rusty Blackbird Migration

- Peak numbers in Ohio are 15 Oct–15 Nov ([Peterjohn 1989b](#))
- Average fall arrival in Chicago, IL, is 26 Sep ([Bohlen 1989](#)).
- Often joins mixed flocks with other blackbird species
- Forages in stubble, pasture, plowed fields, and edges of swamps.
- Occasionally roosts on the ground in open fields

Rusty Blackbird Populations

- Winter population estimates are not available.
- Spotty distribution in the winter range.
- Usually represent <1% of very large mixed-species blackbird roosts
- Significant short- and long-term declines
 - 90% since 1960s

Brewer's Blackbird



Major passage periods during southbound movements through Kansas, Missouri, and Arizona are mid-Oct to early Nov; through Oklahoma and Arkansas in early Nov. In most years, begin arriving in numbers in principal wintering areas, including Mexican localities, about the middle of Oct through mid-Nov.



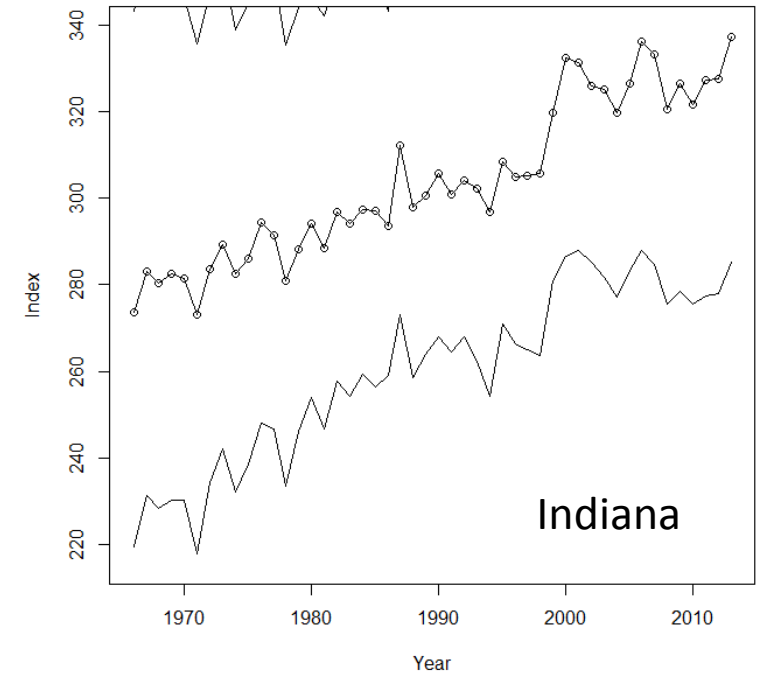
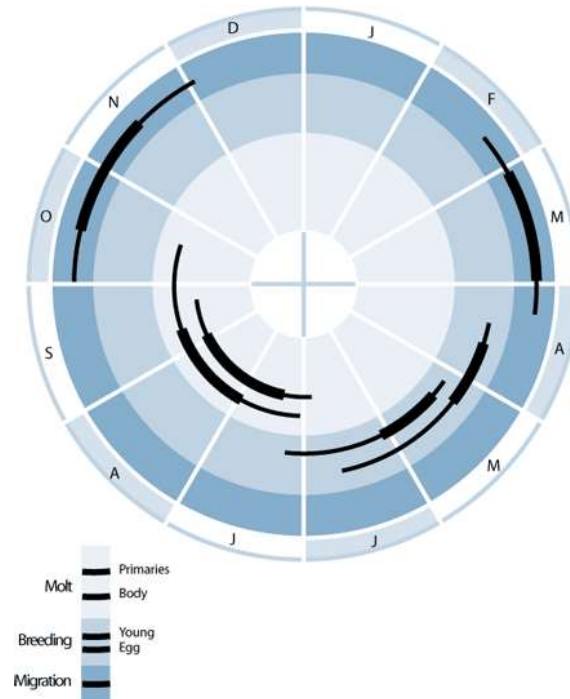
European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

- Iridescent black with yellow bill during breeding season (alternate plumage)
- The terminal spots are lost through wear, esp. head and breast.
- All starlings after the first Prebasic molt have very similar plumage. (Juvenile molting to 1st winter plumage)



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European Starling



Starling Feeding and Diet

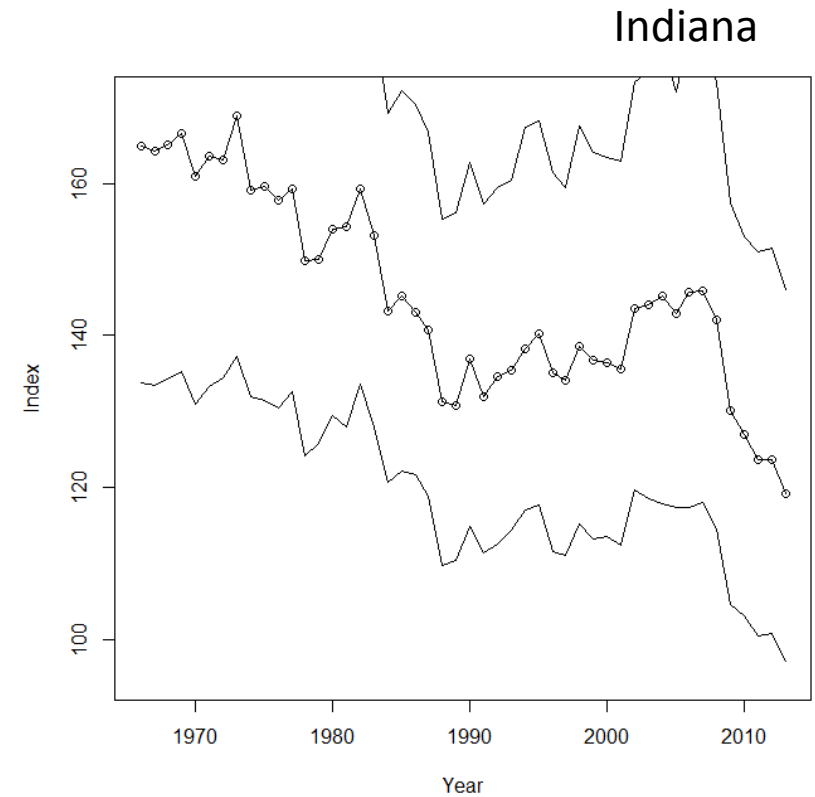
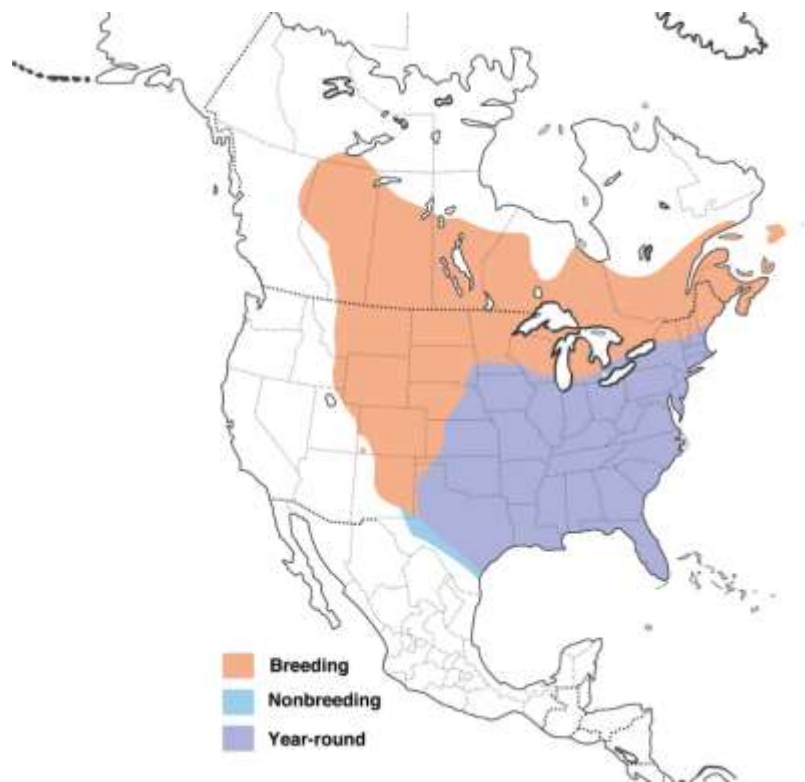
- Diverse diet and forage in flocks (also multispecies) throughout year
 - Smaller in spring and summer
- Grains and seeds taken when available
- Change roosts to move closer to ephemeral food sources

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

- Iridescent black plumage
- Males with purple/blue/green tint
- Females less glossy,



Common Grackle



Common Grackle

- Feeds on insects and other invertebrates, some grain during breeding season
- Agricultural grains or seeds, some fruit during migration and winter
 - Reported to pull up sprouting corn, feed on dent-stage corn
- A year-round average of about 70–75% plant seeds and fruits, most of which are agricultural grains and seeds [Meanley 1971b](#)).

Common Grackle

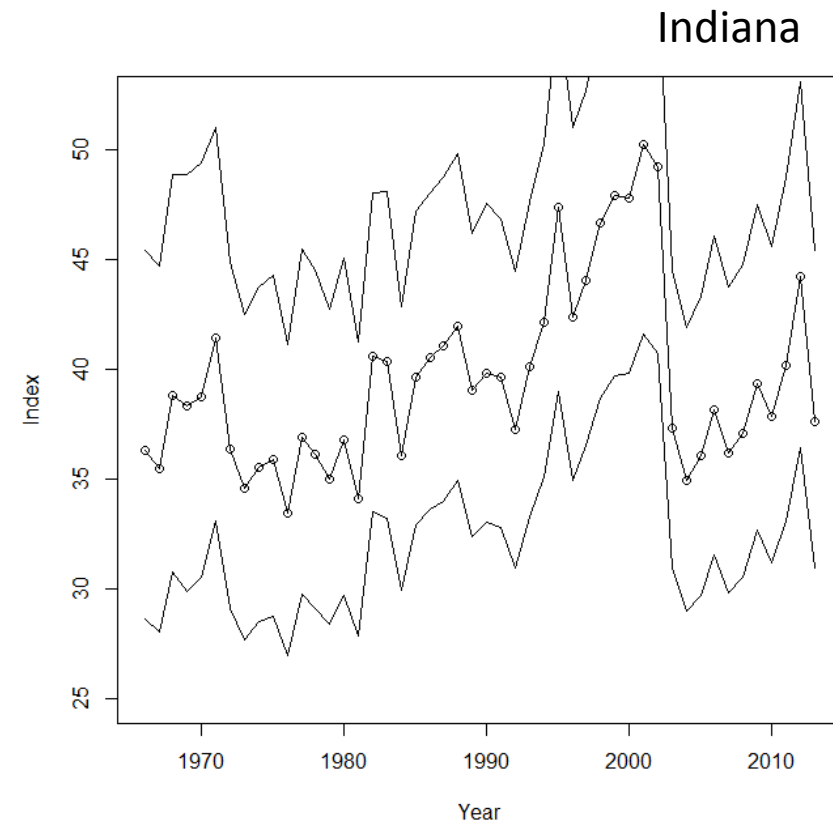
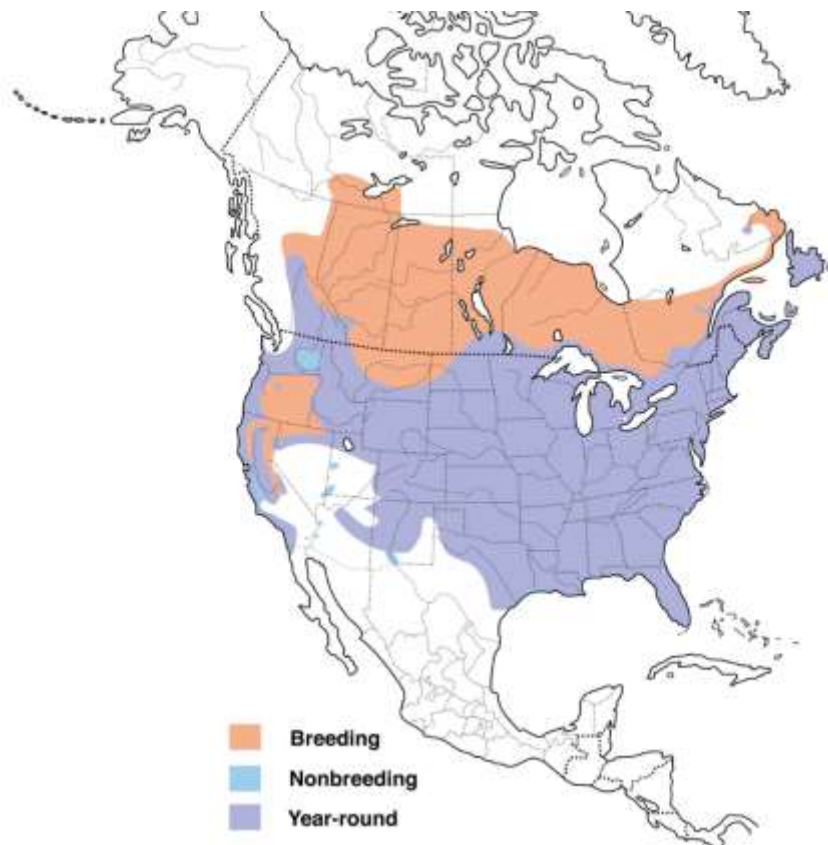
- Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds are responsible for most bird damage to ripening corn in U.S. ([Besser and Brady 1986](#))
- Common Grackles are also the most important species involved in damaging sprouting corn, a multimillion dollar problem annually ([Stone and Mott 1973](#))
- Gregarious; semicolonial, with up to 200 pairs in single "colony," but also nests singly ([Peck and James 1987](#)).

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

- Generally black body
- Sexes alike (male slightly larger)
- Tips of wings do not reach tip of tail at rest
- Timing of molt is unknown; plumages are similar



American Crow



American Crow

- High animal matter in diet compared to other species; predatory
- Corn, grain sorghum, watermelon
- Most of the food taken by crows is obtained on the ground ([Imler 1939](#))
 - Pull seedlings or consume available grain



Acknowledgements

- Bird images, distribution maps, and annual cycle figures from Birds of North America, Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Population maps generated from Breeding Bird Survey, USGS