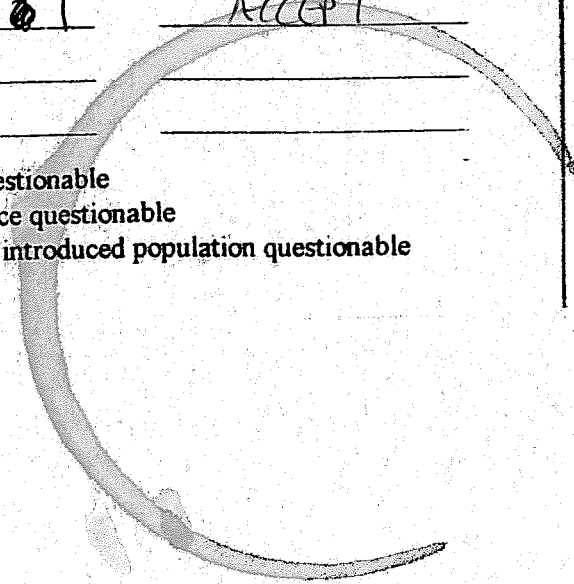


MASSACHUSETTS AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE

Record # 02-32 Species SHINY COWBIRD
Date seen 10/14/02 Location EDGARTOWN (DUMES)
Observer VERN LAUX

Ballot #	Date	Yes	No	Decision
#1	<u>2/6/03</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>ACCEPT</u>
#2	_____	_____	_____	_____
#3	_____	_____	_____	_____

- Reason for rejection:
- identification questionable
 - natural occurrence questionable
 - establishment of introduced population questionable



Shiny Cowbird

Subject: Shiny Cowbird

Date: Tue, 11 Mar 2003 17:55:22 -0500

From: "Marj. Rines" <marj@mrines.com>

To: Vern Laux <vernlaux@earthlink.net>

Hi Vern,

Just wanted to let you know that your report of Shiny Cowbird has been accepted by the MARC. I normally congratulate people who get a new state record, but - Shiny Cowbird???? Oh well, congratulations anyway! What a year, with Elegant Tern, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Pacific Golden-Plover, Lazuli Bunting....

Thanks for sending the description, Vern. We very much appreciate your sending it in.

Best, Marj.

--

Marj. Rines
Secretary, Massachusetts Avian Records Committee

To: Massachusetts Avian Records Committee
From: E. Vernon Laux
RE: Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) Sighting on October 14, 2002 at Herring Creek Farm, Edgartown, Massachusetts

Ladies and Gentlemen-for your consideration,

At 4:30 P.M. on Monday October 14, 2002, I (E. Vernon Laux) was checking a garden for sparrows at Herring Creek Farm in the Katama section of Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard accompanied by Sally Anderson of West Tisbury. The weather was superb, a frontal system having just vacated and finally the weather was clear with a light northwest wind. This held much promise for the morning of the 15th at the extreme western tip of the island-the cliffs.

The garden was full of birds and we proceeded from northwest to southeast keeping the light behind us. Birds were flushing left and right, many sparrows bailing out across a small lawn area to bushes and the roof of the nearby caretaker's house. Many sparrows were landing on the peak of the roof.

Checking each bird as it went my eyes caught a shiny purplish iridescent shine off a blackbird that had just appeared on a piece of slate, a wind baffle, on top of the chimney. My instant impression was that I was about to cream a Brewer's Blackbird, a species that I have seen at this very location on a handful of occasions.

I put my binoculars (B&L Elite 8x42) on this bird and was stunned to see that it was not a Brewer's Blackbird but a cowbird with dark eye and completely purplish (in fact very shiny due to the favorable light) sheen, including the head. I proclaimed to my birding companion that afternoon, "Oh my God-that's a Shiny Cowbird!" She replied, "It sure is" with no idea that I was talking about a species she had never heard of.

The bird was approximately 60 feet away approximately 25 feet high sitting on a flat piece of slate in terrific light. I said to my companion that this cowbird is from South America, has been colonizing the Caribbean and is a different species called appropriately enough-Shiny Cowbird. No one has seen one of these damn cowbirds here before.

This bird was indeed shiny with the sun behind us lighting it up. It appeared longer-tailed and slightly longer overall with a perceptibly thinner bill than Brown-headed Cowbird. The bird stayed put on the top of the chimney and allowed close scrutiny.

Naturally, I had no camera (hoping for digital for Xmas) handy so despite a great photo op there are no pictures. The bird stayed put and we watched it, as both the bird and the observers moved around the chimney to get a better view of its head and bill shape for approximately 10 minutes. There was no cell phone reception so we were unable to call other birders until we left.

The bird flew off to the north and we went in pursuit but were unable to relocate it. The weather was perfect the next day and over 500 brown-headed cowbirds were seen departing the extreme western tip of the Vineyard in the first hour of daylight. Despite repeated efforts by multiple observers, checking the place where it was seen and other favored spots, the cowbird was not seen again.

Respectfully, E. Vernon Laux

Note from Marj: the following is an article Vern wrote for the Vineyard Gazette that week. He did not include it in his submission, but I found it online and include it for your reading or not.

Vineyard Gazette
October 18, 2002
Bird News
By E. VERNON LAUX

The Columbus Day Weekend, despite nasty weather and a reduced birding effort, was just fine for birds on the Vineyard. <snip>

Most unexpected and unprecedented was the discovery of a new bird for Massachusetts on the late afternoon of Oct. 14, Columbus Day.

The bird, a relatively new arrival to North America, a male shiny cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*), was found sitting on a chimney at Katama. The bird was well seen in perfect light, allowing great views before it flew away. Similar to the familiar and common brown-headed cowbird, it differs in being slightly longer-tailed and longer-billed and by its overall coloration, an iridescent shiny purple, head included.

This bird was, as the common name implies, quite shiny as it was observed from close range with the sun behind the observers. This writer and Sally Anderson of West Tisbury located, identified and studied this heretofore-unknown species in Massachusetts. Initial reaction to the bird suggested that it was going to be a Brewer's blackbird because of the color, but after looking at it and seeing it was a cowbird with a dark eye, its identification was quickly arrived at. It could not be relocated that day or subsequently. Unfortunately, it shares the same nasty habits as other cowbirds and is a brood parasite.

The shiny cowbird was first detected in southern Florida in 1985. Since then it has been slowly spreading west and north with scattered records from as far north as New Brunswick, Canada. There is a record from Monhegan Island in Maine, but there had been none from Massachusetts until this report. To date this bird has not been relocated - apparently it has moved on.

<snip>

MASSACHUSETTS AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE
BALLOT

Committee Member's Name TREVOR LLOYD-EVANS
 Species SHINY COWBIRD MARC Rec. # 02-32
 Sighting date 10/14/02 Location Edgartown (Dukes)

	Ballot number	#1	#2	#3
Vote to accept		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote to reject		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
identification not established		1	1	1
natural occurrence questionable		2	2	2
establishment of introduced population questionable		3	3	3

Discussion _____

02-32 Another potential state record. I hope this record is accepted on the close view, description, time of year, pattern of records from the SE and the experience of Vernon Laux in particular. His description covers all the salient fieldmarks, and given his experience of birding in general, and on the Vineyard in particular, his rejection of other similar species is convincing. Accept.

MASSACHUSETTS AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE
BALLOT

Committee Member's Name Richard S. Heil
Species SHINY COWBIRD MARC Rec. # 02-32
Sighting date 10/14/02 Location EDGARTOWN, MARTHA'S VINEYARD

	Ballot number	#1	#2	#3
<u>Vote to accept</u>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote to reject		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
identification not established		1	1	1
natural occurrence questionable		2	2	2
establishment of introduced population questionable		3	3	3

Discussion a first state record should require a high burden of proof. Here we have no photograph and a rather informal, not too detailed description.

Nevertheless, I'm willing to accept, largely because of the observers know ability and the likelihood of occurrence of this species. I ~~wished~~ wish he had explained more fully why this was a cowbird rather than an Euphagus blackbird, but at close range in good light, the "shiny purplish iridescence", "dark eye" and "perceptibly thinner bill than a Brown-headed Cowbird" make me believe that he indeed had a male Shiny Cowbird.

RSH

MASSACHUSETTS AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE

BALLOT

Committee Member's Name Wayne R Petersen
 Species Shiny Cowbird MARC Rec. # 02-32
 Sighting date 10/14/02 Location Edgartown

Ballot number	#1	#2	#3
Vote to accept only	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vote to reject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
identification not established	1	1	1
natural occurrence questionable	2	2	2
establishment of introduced population questionable	3	3	3

Discussion This report, not unlike the recent reports of Thick-billed Kingbird, Broad-billed Sandpiper, and Boat-tailed Grackle, offers a real problem in this member's mind. The report, on the face of things, sounds very convincing - a bird not that difficult to identify, seen at a fine location for vagrants, of a species with precedence in New England, by a competent observer. On the other hand, it's yet another first MA record! Hopefully we will take the opportunity to visit this question at the Annual Meeting. In the meantime, this is as solid a report as several others in the same category. I'll vote for it.

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