

Great-tailed Grackle

Quiscalus mexicanus

A big, brash blackbird, the male Great-tailed Grackle shimmers in iridescent black and purple, and trails a tail that will make you look twice. The rich brown females are about half the male's size. Flocks of these long-legged, social birds strut and hop on suburban lawns, golf courses, fields, and marshes in Texas, the Southwest, and southern Great Plains. In the evening, raucous flocks pack neighborhood trees, filling the sky with their amazing (some might say ear-splitting) voices.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Male Great-tailed Grackles are long-legged, slender blackbirds with a flat-headed profile and stout, straight bills. The male's tapered tail is nearly as long as its body and folds into a distinctive V or keel shape. Females are about half the size of males with long, slender tails.

Color Pattern

Male Great-tailed Grackles are iridescent black with piercing yellow eyes, and black bills and legs. Females are dark brown above, paler below, with a buff-colored throat and stripe above the eye. Juveniles have the female's dark brown plumage, with streaked underparts and a dark eye.

Behavior

You'll often see Great-tailed Grackles with other blackbirds pecking for food on lawns, fields, and at marsh edges, vying for trash in urban settings, or crowding in trees and on telephone lines in noisy roosts.

Habitat

Look for Great-tailed Grackles in rural and developed areas of the Midwest and West, foraging in agricultural fields and feedlots, and in suburbs including golf courses, cemeteries, parks, and neighborhood lawns. Large trees and vegetation edging marshes, lakes, and lagoons provide roosting and breeding sites.

Cool Facts

- Great-tailed Grackles—especially females—learn to recognize individual researchers working in their breeding colonies, and will react with a chut alarm call when they see the researcher, even away from

