

## THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“Not all Blackbirds are Black”

*by HSV Audubon*

Saying that you saw a blackbird is similar to saying you saw a duck. Most curious birders will wonder, “what kind blackbird/duck did you see?” The problem is that most people think that a Blackbird is a specific bird when actually it is a family of birds. There are 21 species in the Blackbird family in N. America. The most common in HSV and throughout the U.S. is the Red-winged Blackbird. Other Blackbird family members often seen in the Village are Common Grackles and Brown-headed Cowbirds. All are present year around. Most of the Blackbird species gather in large flocks during migration periods. These flocks, often of mixed Blackbird species, can numbers in the 10’s of thousands.

The male Red-winged Blackbird, a mostly black bird, can be identified by it’s bright red-shoulder patch during breeding season. Later on the patch diminishes but still has an orange/yellow color. The male Brown-cowbird is black with a brown head. Grackles appear black but actually have a lot of deep blue/purple color in their feathers. Their long tails are a primary ID marker. The females of each are more of a drab brown color.

The Brown-headed Cowbirds have a unique behavior that dismays much of the birding community. They are parasitic nesters which means that Mrs. Cowbird searches out the nests of other species in which to lay her eggs; at that which point the Cowbirds are free from any parenting responsibility. To make it worse, the cowbird babies are big and hog most of the food in the nest at the mortal expense of the host species babies. Life is not fair.

Surprisingly, some very closely related members of the Blackbird family are among the most colorful- the Orioles. The bright black and orange Baltimore is the one of the most colorful of all birds. Baltimores migrate through theVillage in the spring. While not common, some of our Audubon members see then at their hummingbird feeders. Although Baltimores nest in places along the Arkansas River, they don’t nest here. However, their slightly less colorful rust and black colored relative, the Orchard Oriole does. The female Orchard and the 1st year male Orchards are a yellowish color and look nothing like the mature male The young male is the same color as the female but has a distinct black V-shaped bib.

Meadowlarks are another member of the Blackbird family that are colorful. Although they are uncommon in the Village, they are common in the Goosepond and Danville farm properties that are surrounded by the Village.

As always HSVBIRDS.ORG has a lot of information about everything you'd like to know about birds and some of Nature's other wonders. HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except July and August, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky