

## Grackle, Grackle, Grackle

February 24, 2017by...Rufus Hello. I am Rufus. I will tell you a little about myself including how I got my name but first we need to get some things straight before we go any further. I am not a raven or a crow. Those birds are bigger than me and I sure don't want to ruffle their feathers. Nor am I a grooved-bill ani with a funky down-turned beak. I am certainly not one of those pesky little melodious blackbirds you have probably heard around here. What's up with that name anyway? It just sounds like squawking to me! I am a grackle. A Mexican grackle or a great-tailed grackle to be exact and since I am a dominate male my feathers are a beautiful iridescent black with a purple-blue sheen when I ruffle them. Some know me as a keel or boat-tailed grackle because I fold and hold my tail-feathers vertically and that's okay with me, particularly if it is sailor folks calling me that, but actually boat-tailed grackles are a different species and our ranges only overlap in coastal Texas and Louisiana. There are eight other species of us but none of them mess with us great-tails when we allow them to mingle with us. (Click "Read More..." below.)

My ancestors are from South and Central America and Mexico but I now have family from Venezuela to Minnesota and I heard that some of my crazy more adventuresome cousins have checked out Canada in the warm months. We like warm weather and feed in pastures, wet-lands, and mangroves where we will eat almost anything we can find. We grackles are social birds and I don't mind a few lessor males trying to infringe on my territory but, being the dominate male, I am most interested in attracting females to my domain with my extensive repertoire of calls. Smaller than me with soft brown breast feathers those chicks are the bomb. I guess that some of you humans consider us to be raucous and a pest because of our loud calls but not all of you do. You don't have to take my word for it; the following is straight from Wikipedia. In Mexico, where it is known as the chanate or zanate, there is a legend that it has seven songs. "In the creation, the Zanate having no voice, stole its seven distinct songs from the wise and knowing sea turtle. You can now hear the Zanate's vocals as the Seven Passions (Love, Hate, Fear, Courage, Joy, Sadness, and Anger) of life." Mexican artisans have created icons in clay, sometimes as whistles that portray the sea turtle with the zanate perched on its back. In Colombia, the species is called Maria mulata and is the official bird of Cartagena de Indias. Cartagena artist, Enrique Grau, had an affinity for these birds and because of his inspiration many Colombian monuments and artistic works were created in honor of its intelligence, adaptability, cheerfulness, sociability and collaborative tendencies, diligence, craftiness, and ability to take advantage of adversity. Like it says above, we are smart. We can solve Aesop's Fable test. But, after all, how hard is it to figure out that if you want a piece of food floating low and out of reach in a water filled tube all you have to do is drop stuff into the tube until the water level rises and floats the food within reach? What's up with that Aesop guy anyway, thinking up stuff like that and telling a bunch of stories? Who has more vowels than consonants in their name anyway? So anyway, I live on a sliver of the little finger of swamp-land that separates the Rio Colocho from the Rio Dulce. You do know where the Rio Colocho is, don't you? Right! It's the bay water you go down to get to Graciela's. Graciela and Gary own Hotel Kangaroo and Restaurante Las Mexicanas. Bob thinks her kitchen turns out chicken enchiladas smothered in the best tomatillo sauce anywhere ever. I fly by there every once in a while to see if I can score a tortilla off of the front deck. Besides that, I think Graciela is pretty. I don't let Trish know but I think Bob thinks so too. Bob and Trish Meredith built me a nice walk-way behind my house where I let them live with their cat, Estrella. That cat has the shortest tail and she spends a lot of her time flat on her back. She's so fat that she couldn't catch me if she tried as I strut my stuff every morning at daybreak and give them all their courtesy wake-up call. Trish has a jar of seashells she collected on her kitchen counter (don't ask me how I know this) so I guess she must like shells. I leave her an empty snail shell on the board-walk at least two or three times a week. There's nothing like escargot for breakfast, you know. The rest of the day I just spend chasing the ladies and doing my thing here and there. Nothing too serious mind you, but I always check my territory every hour or so and announce my arrival when I return. Bob and Trish usually answer back with the weirdest sound. Something like Rruuufuuss. I am not sure about them. If they are trying to mimic one of my calls, they have a ways to go. Anyway, now you know how I got my name. If you want to stop by and say hello sometime that's fine; like I said, we are social birds. But remember, we Latins are big on social graces and good manners dictate that you bring a little something with you when you visit. Cracked corn is one of my favorites. I hope to see you soon.