

## MACGILLIVRAY'S AND BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLERS COMPETE TO FEED FLEDGLING COWBIRD

Jim R. Salt  
464 Nelson Street  
Victoria, B.C. V9A 6P4

**Abstract** -- An attempted feeding of a fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird by a male MacGillivray's Warbler near Victoria, British Columbia was interrupted by a male Black-throated Gray Warbler, which chased the MacGillivray's away and fed the cowbird. Both subsequently fed the cowbird.

**Key words:** Black-throated Gray Warbler, Brown-headed Cowbird, *Dendroica nigrescens*, interspecific feeding, MacGillivray's Warbler, *Oporornis tolmiei*, Victoria.

The feeding-demands of young birds, and the adults' responses, are familiar to all naturalists. The begging ritual of many species of fledglings, usually a fluttering of wings with displays of the gape, is imitated by adult females of a number of bird species during mating and is documented in the literature (e.g. Welty 1975). Interspecific responses to begging displays between parasitic young (such as immature Brown-headed Cowbirds, *Molothrus ater*) and the adoptive parents are also common and well-documented (e.g. Friedmann 1929; Bent 1958; Skutch 1996).

The present note concerns an unusual interspecific occurrence involving a begging-display, observed by the author and W. Ray Salt during a breeding-bird survey just north of Victoria, British Columbia. We had completed a morning observation session at 09:00 on 27 June 1991, when we saw a young Brown-headed Cowbird engaged in a begging display. As we watched, a male MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*) carrying food, alighted beside the cowbird. Almost immediately, the warbler's attempt at feeding was interrupted by the arrival of a male Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), also carrying food. The Black-throated Gray chased off the MacGillivray's, then alighted and fed the cowbird fledgling.

During the ensuing 45 minutes, two male MacGillivray's Warblers sang in the vicinity, and a male Black-throated Gray Warbler came twice more to feed the cowbird. A male MacGillivray's also made two feeding visits, but was successful only once in passing food to the cowbird. The MacGillivray's fled instantly into dense shrubbery in deep shade, at the return of the male Black-throated Gray Warbler.

These two warbler species are apparently minor hosts of the Brown-headed Cowbird. Friedmann (1929, 1949, 1963) and Friedmann *et al.* (1977) record relatively few instances of cowbird parasitism on these species.

That the begging display can be an extremely strong stimulus to feed other birds is exemplified by an instance in which a female White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*) fed a begging adult Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) in south

Jasper Park, Alberta in 1977 (Salt 1984). Presumably young had hatched in the nests of the pairs of both warbler males in this instance, hormonally priming them to feed young. Whether or not the cowbird had fledged from the nest of either, it would have provided a powerful feeding stimulus, especially if the young of one of them had been lost recently to predation or other causes.

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