

UU LEN BAS
MIS: BIRD THREAT

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environment

GLOSSY COWBIRD IN CUBA, THREATENS INVASION OF FLORIDA:
BY LIONEL MARTIN

HAVANA, FEB 1, REUTER -- THERE IS THE THREAT THAT THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES WILL BE INVADDED BY THE GLOSSY COWBIRD WHICH HAS DEVASTATED THE POPULATION OF OTHER SMALL BIRD SPECIES AS IT HAS MADE ITS WAY UP, OVER DECADES, FROM THE SOUTHERN TIP OF SOUTH AMERICA, THROUGH THE CARIBBEAN TO CUBA, ONLY NINETY MILES AWAY FROM KEY WEST, FLORIDA, THE CUBAN ORNITHOLOGIST, ORLANDO GARRIDO, TOLD REUTER.

THE EIGHTEEN CENTIMETER (7 INCH) LONG GLOSSY COWBIRD LAYS ITS EGGS IN THE NESTS OF OTHER BIRDS AND THEN ABANDONS THEM. THE HOST BIRD UNKNOWINGLY HATCHES THE EGGS AND EVEN FEEDS THE STRANGERS UNTIL THEY FLY AWAY.

THE GLOSSY COWBIRDS OFTEN PUSH THE ORIGINAL EGGS OUT OF A NEST BEFORE SUBSTITUTING THEM WITH THEIR OWN. IN MANY CASES, GARRIDO SAID, THE HOST BIRD IS INHIBITED FROM LAYING EGGS WHEN IT FINDS ITS NEST ALREADY HAS EGGS IN IT.

THE CUBAN ORNITHOLOGIST SAID THAT STUDIES MADE IN OTHER AREAS INDICATE THAT THE BREEDING OF THE HOST SPECIES DIMINISHES BY AS MUCH AS SEVENTY PERCENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SAID, THE POPULATION OF THE GLOSSY COWBIRDS GROW IN GEOMETRICAL PROPORTIONS AND THEY COME TO DOMINATE THE ECOLOGICAL SPACE OF THE REGION.

GARRIDO PREDICTS THAT THERE WILL BE A DEMOGRAPHIC EXPLOSION OF THE GLOSSY COWBIRD IN CUBA. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN SPOTTED IN AREAS FIVE HUNDRED MILES APART ON THE LONG, NARROW ISLAND. HE SAID IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE HARDY BIRD HOPS ACROSS THE STRAITS OF FLORIDA IN LARGE ENOUGH NUMBERS TO MAKE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE SMALL BIRD SPECIES THERE.

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THE CUBAN SCIENTIST SAID THAT THE GLOSSY COWBIRD THREATENS TO DO LASTING DAMAGE TO CUBA'S HUGE AND VARIED BIRD KINGDOM. HE SAID THAT THE FIRST VICTIMS MIGHT BE THOSE WHICH ARE SIMILAR TO THE GLOSSY COWBIRD SUCH AS THE GRACKLE, THE TAWNY-SHOULDERED BLACKBIRD, THE REDWINGED BLACKBIRD AND THE GREATER ANTILLEAN ORIOLE. WHEN THESE SPECIES ARE DIMINISHED IN QUANTITY, HE PREDICTED, OTHER WILL FALL VICTIM SUCH AS THE ENDEMIC ZAPATA FINCH, THE ZAPATA WREN, THE STOLID FLYCATCHER, THE CUBAN VIREA AND THE GOLDEN WARBLER.

THE PARASITIC BIRD, WHICH CUBANS CALL +THE COWBOY BIRD+ (PAJARA VAQUERO) RECEIVED ITS SCIENTIFIC NAME, MOLOTHRUS BONARIENSIS, WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED IN ARGENTINA DURING THE LAST CENTURY. IT HAD ARRIVED IN GRENADA IN THE CARIBBEAN BY THE TURN OF THE PRESENT CENTURY, GARRIDO SAID, AND SPREAD NORTH TO PUERTO RICO BY 1955, TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC BY 1972 AND TO CUBA AROUND A DECADE AGO..

GARRIDO SAID THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME THE THREAT POSED BY THE GLOSSY COWBIRD. CUBANS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO REPORT SPOTTING THE BIRD WHICH IS DESCRIBED AS FROM 18 TO 20 CENTIMETERS IN LENGTH (7 OR 8 INCHES) AND WHICH IS BLACK WITH A VIOLET LUSTER (MALES) OR BROWNISH-GREY ABOVE AND DARKER UNDERNEATH (FEMALE). THEY HAVE BEEN ASKED TO REPORT THE FINDINGS TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION OF THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL THEN NOTIFY THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES IN HAVANA. GARRIDO SAID CUBAN SCIENTISTS ARE TRYING TO WORK OUT A STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE INVADERS.

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