CITY OF AUSTIN

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD CONTROL PROGRAM

Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

Fiscal Year 2000-01

The City of Austin
Parks & Recreation Department
Natural Resources Division

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I. Background Information

The brown-headed cowbird (BHCO) *(Molothrus ater)* is well-known for its parasitism of neotropical songbirds and can severely impact population numbers of both the black-capped vireo and the golden-cheeked warbler, the two endangered songbird species protected on the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) tracts. The female BHCO lays her eggs in the vireo or warbler nests, often removing one or more of the host's eggs. The young BHCO hatches several days before the vireo or warbler and dominates the nest, being the first to get fed. Often the vireo or warbler hatchlings do not survive, because of the aggressiveness of the young cowbird. Often the adult songbird will abandon the nest.

Prior to 2000, the task of monitoring and collecting data for BHCO traps located on City of Austin (COA) BCP tracts was undertaken by Travis County and/or other entities. During the 2000 breeding season, COA BCP staff began monitoring traps located on COA BCP lands. The data collected from the 2000 BHCO survey was turned over to Travis County, for inclusion and compilation in their report (Bailey, 2000).

II. Trap Locations and Procedures

There are four cowbird traps on COA BCP tracts: Canyon Creek (mega trap), Cortaña (hybrid), Ivanhoe (mega), and 3M (hybrid) (see figure 1 for locations). Trapping protocols established by The Nature Conservancy's Fort Hood office were followed (Cavanagh *et al.* 2000) and information for each trap was recorded on a separate data sheet (see attached data sheet). At the beginning of the trapping season, each trap was "seeded" with BHCO decoys, which were obtained from Travis County and from TPWD (see Table 1 for decoy information). Traps were checked every other day, with the addition of feed and water when necessary. When the traps became crowded, the excess BHCO were euthanized and disposed. Data from banded birds was collected and recorded (see Table 4). All non-target species were released immediately from the traps (see Table 3).

III. Results

The monitoring for the 2001 trapping season began in April (a month later than the 2000 season). Table 1 shows the following information: trap months, trap name and trap type, total trapping days, number of seed cowbirds, number of new males captured for each trap (per month), number of new females captured for each trap (per month), number of new immature cowbirds captured for each trap (per month), total number of captures per trap (per month), and total number of BHCO (males, females, immatures, total) captured for the entire season. On May 1, a very large flock of BHCO entered the 3M trap, and these birds (29 males and 30 females) were euthanized on May 2.

Table 2 shows the total number of BHCO trapped in the 2001 season, by site and by month. Table 2 also compares the 2001 data with the 2000 data, including number of trapping days, per site, for each year. Although the number of BHCO trapped in the 2001 season (114) was less than the 2000 season (212), when adjusted for number of birds per day, it becomes apparent that the range of numbers for the two years are not that widely different, with the exception of the 2001 3M trap (1.369) and the 2000 Ivanhoe trap (.138). However, the overall numbers of cowbirds trapped in both years are really quite small, when compared to other trapping programs (Bailey, 2000).

Table 3 lists the number and species of non-target bird trapped, as well as reptiles which were found inside the traps. Table 4 lists data on the only banded BHCO which was found inside COA BCP traps.

LITERATURE CITED

Bailey, J.W. 2000. Brown-headed Cowbird Program Travis County Natural Resources *in* Annual Status Report FY 2000 Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan, January 2000

Cavanagh, P.M., G. Eckrich, S. Summers, and B. Holiman. 2000. Fort Hood Project Research Protocols: Cowbird Trapping. The Nature Conservancy of Texas, Fort Hood, Texas



Figure One
Cowbird trap locations on City of Austin Balcones Canyonlands Preserve tracts, 2001

Table 1. 2001 BHCO Trapping Data for COA Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

Month/Yr	Trap Name & Type	Total Trap Days	# of Decoys BHCO	New Males	New Females	New Immatures	Total # in Trap
April, 2001	Canyon Ck (a)	11	5	1	1	0	2
	Cortaña (b)	17	13	2	2	0	4
	Ivanhoe (a)	11	5	5	2	0	7
	3M (b)	11	6	5	1	0	6
May, 2001	Canyon Ck	28		4	5	1	10
	Cortaña	28		9	0	0	9
	Ivanhoe	28		10	4	0	14
	3M	28		29	28	0	57
June, 2001	Canyon Ck	7		0	2	3	5
	Cortaña	7		0	0	0	0
	Ivanhoe	7		0	0	0	0
	3M	7		0	0	0	0
Total BHCO Captured				65	45	4	114

(a)-mega trap
(b)-hybrid trap

Table 2. Number of BHCO Trapped in 2001, and Comparison with 2000 Data

	April	May	June	2001 Total in Trap	2001 Birds/Day	2000 Total in Trap *	2000 Birds/Day
Canyon Creek [(a)]	2	10	5	17	17/46=.37	118 [(c)]	118/122=.9
Cortaña [(b)]	4	9	0	13	13/52=.25	37 [(d)]	37/92=.40
Ivanhoe [(a)]	7	14	0	21	21/46=.46	15 [(e)]	15/108=.14
3M [(a)]	6	57	0	63	63/46=1.37	42 [(f)]	42/109=.38
Total	19	90	5	114		212	

* Data in TC BHCO 2000 Report

(a) Trapping days= 46

(b) trapping days= 52

(c) trapping days= 122

(d) trapping days= 92

(e) trapping days= 108

(f) trapping days= 109

Table 3. Non-target Birds and Reptiles Caught During 2001 in COA BHCO Traps

Species	April	May	June
Bronzed Cowbird		1	
Chipping Sparrow			1
Field Sparrow		1	
House Sparrow		1	6
Starling		1	
Yellow-headed Blackbird		1	
Texas Rat Snake	1	1	
Great Plains Rat Snake		2	

Table 4. Banded BHCO Recaptured in 2001 Season on COA BCP Tracts

Band Number	Sex	Year Banded	Age When Banded	Age in 2001	Banding Location	Recapture Location	Distance from Banding to Recapture
8051-03376	Male	1999	ASY [(a)]	AFY [(b)]	Canyon Creek	Ivanhoe	5100 m

(a) ASY= after second year

(b) AFY= after fouth year