CITY OF AUSTIN
BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD CONTROL PROGRAM

BALCONES CANYONLANDS PRESERVE ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year 2001-02

The City of Austin
Water and Wastewater Utility
Wildland Conservation Division
Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Program

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December, 2002

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). The data that COA BCP staff collected from the 2001 BHCO survey on COA BCP lands can be found in the Fiscal Year 2000-01 Report.

II. Trap Locations and Procedures

In 2002, the COA operated four cowbird traps on BCP tracts: Canyon Creek (mega trap), Cortaña (hybrid), Ivanhoe (mega), and Franklin (hybrid) (see figure 1 for locations). The trap at the 3M site was discontinued this year due to low efficacy, and the trap was moved to the Franklin site. Although the 3M site had trapped 63 BHCB in 2001, 59 of these birds were caught in a single day, probably due to a flock flying through the area. 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 were 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 2002 trapping season began in late March. Table 1 shows the following information: trap name, month, number of trapping days, number of male, female, and immature cowbirds captured, total number of captures, trap efficacy, and grand totals. Canyon Creek had the highest trapping efficacy, followed by Ivanhoe. Adding extra trap days to Cortaña did not enhance its efficacy. April and May were the months with the greatest number of BHCB captured.

Table 2 lists the number and species of non-target bird trapped, as well as reptiles which were found inside the traps. Table 3 lists data on the two banded male BHCO which were 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

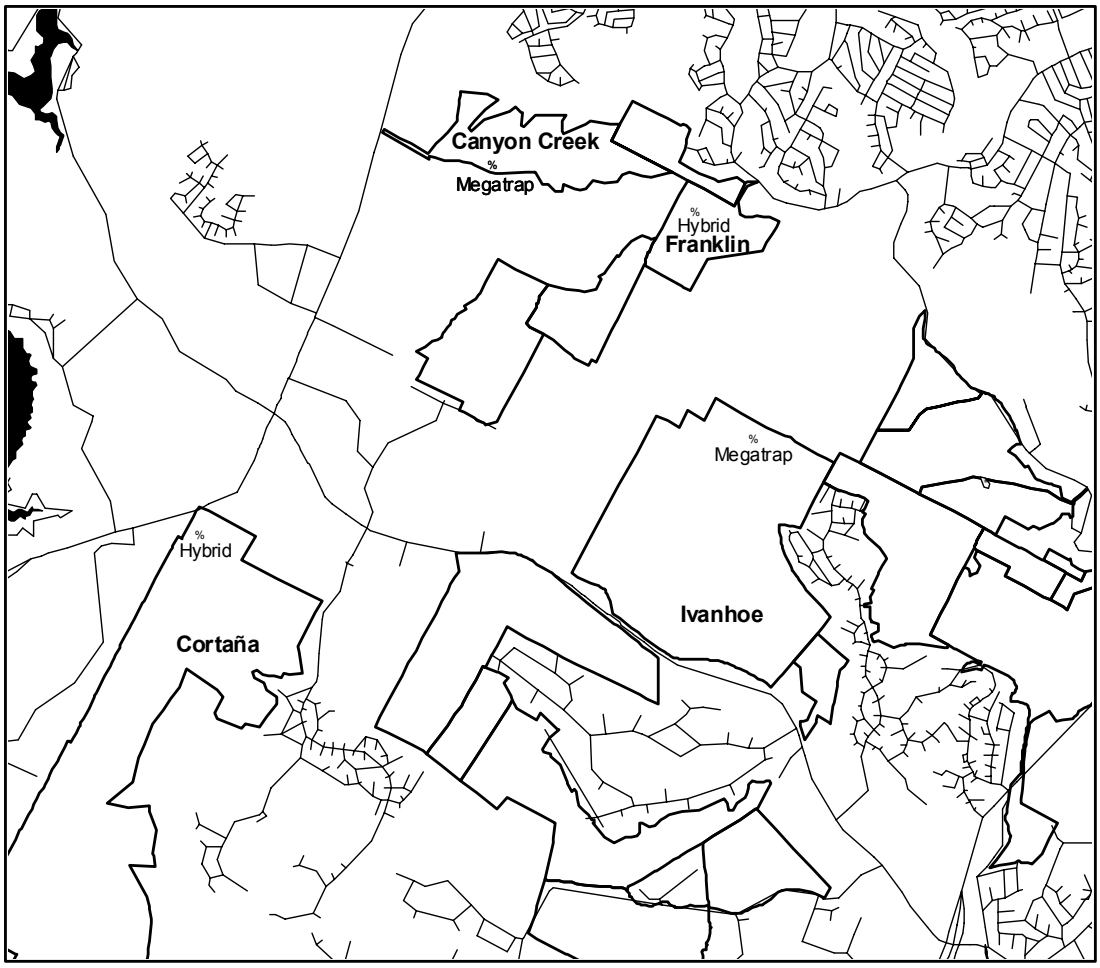

Figure One

Cowbird trap locations on City of Austin Balcones Canyonlands Preserve tracts, 2002

Table 1. 2002 BHCO Trapping Data for COA Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

Trap Name	Month	Total Trap Days	Males Captured	Females Captured	Immatures Captured	Total	Trap Efficacy*
Canyon Creek	March	10	1	1	0	2	
	April	30	8	9	0	17	
	May	31	13	3	0	16	
	June	4	0	1	2	3	
	Total	**75**	**22**	**14**	**2**	**38**	**.50**
Cortaña	March	10	0	0	0	0	
	April	30	2	5	0	7	
	May	31	3	1	0	4	
	June	21	0	0	1	1	
	Total	**92**	**5**	**6**	**1**	**12**	**.13**
Ivanhoe	March	10	2	0	0	2	
	April	30	6	6	0	12	
	May	31	4	0	0	4	
	June	5	1	0	0	1	
	Total	**76**	**13**	**6**	**0**	**19**	**.24**
Franklin	April	30	1	0	0	1	
	May	31	2	1	0	3	
	June	4	0	0	0	0	
	Total	**65**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**4**	**.06**
Grand Total			**43**	**27**	**3**	**73**	

* Trap Efficacy (capture rate) = number of BHCB/days in operation

Table 2. Non-target Birds and Reptiles Caught During 2002 in COA BHCO Traps

Species	March	April	May	June
Red-winged Blackbird		1		
Northern Mockingbird			2	
Western Scrub Jay				1
Great Plains Rat Snake			2	

Table 3. Banded BHCO Recaptured in 2002 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
8051-03394	Male	1999	ASY [a]	AFY [b]	Canyon Creek	Ivanhoe	5100 m
8051-03469	Male	1999	ASY	AFY	Canyon Creek	Canyon Creek	0 m