

Aerial Feeding by Red-Winged Blackbirds near Fuller's Lake, North Dakota

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In late September 1973, we often noted both sexes of Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) flycatching in the vicinity of Fuller's Lake, Steele County, North Dakota. They flew several feet more or less vertically from perches in marshes, shelterbelts, and field crops. Eight recorded instances ranged from 11:50 A.M. to 7:15 P.M. (after sunset) on September 27, 28, and 29. From food habits data for Redwings collected in this area during the same period, we believe one of the principal items captured in flight was the winged sexual form of an ant. Seven of 20 Redwings collected September 25 each contained from 1 to 6 winged ants (21 total). Samples were tentatively identified by Robert T. Mitchell, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, as *Lasius*. Species of this genus are abundant and widespread over North America (Creighton 1950).

Baird and Meyerriecks (1965) reported Redwings and Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) aerially feeding on a *Lasius* mating swarm. They regarded both as species that rarely flycatch and believed that they and other species were stimulated to do so in that instance by prolonged aerial feeding on the ants by Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*). At Fuller's Lake in 1973 we saw no flycatching by birds other than Redwings, which gives support to Baird's and Meyerrieck's alternative explanation that feeding was motivated by the extraordinary abundance of an easily obtained food. Gabrielson (1915:301), Orians (1961), and Brower and Brower (1961:11) describe aerial feeding by Redwings on various insects. Donald J. Cunningham (personal communication) recalls much flycatching by Redwings from fences near Columbia, South Dakota, late one summer. Bartlett (1956) and Chamberlain (1966) report aerial feeding by Common Grackles. We conclude that this manner of feeding by the two icterids is not a rare occurrence.

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