

**Songbird
ReMix**

Cowbirds



Avian Models for 3D Applications
Characters and Procedural Maps by Ken Gilliland

Songbird ReMix

Cowbirds

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Introduction

Cowbirds are stocky blackbirds with a fascinating approach to raising its young. Females forgo building nests and instead put all their energy into producing eggs, sometimes more than three dozen a summer. These they lay in the nests of other birds, abandoning their young to foster parents, usually at the expense of at least some of the host's own chicks.

This set contains the character and texture files for a male and female Brown-headed, Shiny and Bronzed Cowbirds. **It requires the Songbird ReMix Songbird Model (purchased separately) to work.** The set comes in native DAZ Studio and Poser versions and supports Iray, Firefly and Superfly render engines.

Overview and Use

The set is located within the **Animals : Songbird ReMix** folder. Here is where you will find a number of folders, such as **Bird Library**, **Manuals** and **Resources**. Let's look at what is contained in these folders:

- **Bird Library:** This folder holds the actual species and poses for the "premade" birds. Birds are placed into a "type" folder (such as "Birds of Prey (Order Falconiformes)" which for example would hold falcons, hawks and eagles). The birds for this set can be found in the following folder(s):
 - **Perching Birds (Order Passeriformes)**
 - **Orioles, Blackbirds & their Allies**
- **Manuals:** Contains a link to the online manual for the set.
- **Props:** Contains any props that might be included in the set
- **Resources:** Items in this folder are for creating and customizing your birds
 - **Bird Base Models:** This folder has the blank, untextured model(s) used in this set. These models are primarily for users who wish to experiment with poses or customize their own species of bird. When using physical renderers such as Iray and Superfly, SubD should be turned to at least "3". For DAZ Studios 3Delight renders, the SubD must be turned

from the “High Resolution” setting to the “Base” setting (otherwise some areas will render incorrectly transparent).

Poser Use

Select **Figures** in the **Runtime** Folder and go to the **Animals : Songbird ReMix** folder. Select the bird from the renderer (*Firefly or Superfly*) folder you want and simply click it to load. Some birds in the Songbird ReMix series may load with attached parts (*Conformers*) such as tail or crest extensions. Some of these parts have specific morphs. You will need to click on the attached part to access those controls. Associated poses can be found in the same folder- **Bird Library : (Type) : Poses**.

DAZ Studio Use

Go to the **Animals : Songbird ReMix** folder. Select the bird from the renderer (*3Delight or Iray*) folder you want and simply click it to load. Some birds in the Songbird ReMix series may load with attached parts (*Conformers*) such as tail or crest extensions. Some of these parts have specific morphs. You will need to click on the attached part to access those controls. Associated poses can be found in the same folder- **Bird Library : (Type) : Poses**. **Note:** Using the "Apply this Character to the currently selected Figure(s)" option **will not** properly apply the correct scaling to the bird selected. It is better to delete the existing character first and load the one you want to use.

One Folder to Rule Them All

When I reworked the entire Songbird ReMix library starting in 2018, I decided to abandon the way the birds were sorted (by product name) and choose an Ornithological approach. All birds are found in the Bird Library folder and are arranged by type of bird. This approach is hopefully easier for most to find what bird they are looking for. Admittedly, it will take some getting use to for some longtime users, but I’ve always approached the Songbird ReMix series as a learning tool as well as a graphics tool, so hopefully some knowledge will rub off by seeing how birds are grouped.

Probably the most deceiving subfolder in the **Bird Library** is “**Perching Birds (Order Passeriformes)**”. This is folder you probably will end up “favoriting” because this one folder (Passeriformes) **holds more than 50% of all birds**. Perching birds range from cardinals and jays to chickadees, crow and swallows.

Finding the bird you want within the “**Perching Birds (Order Passeriformes)**” folder can be daunting, even for an experienced birder (such as myself), so I’ve included an online reference tool within this folder that helps to make your search



easier. Click the “**Perching Birds Finder**” icon and when loaded, look at the first column and search for the type of bird you want. For example, I want a “manakin” (a bird common to Central and South America). Scroll down the first column alphabetically and stop on “manakin”. Looking across to the second column, you will now know that manakins can be found in the “Tyrant Flycatchers & their Allies” subfolder.

Physical-based Rendering

Iray and **Superfly** requires more CPU and memory horsepower than the legacy renderers because of ray-trace bounces and higher resolution meshes needed for displacement. Poser’s **Superfly** renderer will require that the “Min Transparent Bounces” be set to **at least 16** and that the “Max Transparent Bounces” be set to **at least 32** in render settings. Superfly renders may show artifacts in the head area. This is a known Poser issue and may be addressed in the future. Increasing the SubD may minimize this issue.

Posing & Shaping Considerations

This volume has various species, so when using generic poses not every pose will work perfectly with every bird. You may find that some minor alteration on the stock poses may be warranted.

Here are some of the most common alterations you may need to make:

- Birds will not be flat on the zero plane due to leg size and overall scale.
- Because of the numerous beak shapes, closing the beak may range from 0.5 to 1. Usually 0.8 is about right.
- **Raise Upper Beak** (*in Action Controls*): This morph is a “one size fits all” control. Because of the variety of beak shapes. It may not work with all birds.

IK Concerns

Some poses may go askew when IK is turned on. By default, Poser’s IK feature is turned off when loading a bird. To turn it on, select the “Figure” category from the main tool bar and “Use Inverse Kinematics” from the submenu.

By default, DAZ Studio’s IK feature is turned on when loading a bird. This will cause the thigh and shin rotations change when the character is moved. The CTRL K keypress will turn IK on and off in DAZ Studio. IK doesn’t work that well in Studio, so I suggest selecting the character in the Scene tab and simply deleting the two IK body parts to remove IK.

Where to find your Birds and Poses

Type Folder	For what species?
Perching Birds (Order Passeriformes) Orioles, NW Blackbirds & their Allies	Brown-headed Cowbird Shiny Cowbird Bronzed Cowbird

Common Name: Brown-headed Cowbird
Scientific Name: *Molothrus ater*

Size: 7.5-8.7 inches (19–22 cm)

Habitat: North America; it is found throughout southern Canada, the entire United States and North and Central Mexico. It is a short distance migrant. Brown-headed Cowbirds move south as far as 530 miles between breeding and wintering grounds.

It prefers open habitats, such as fields, pastures, meadows, forest edges, and lawns. When not displaying or feeding on the ground, they often perch high on prominent tree branches.

Status: Least Concern. **Global Population:** Unknown number of mature individuals with a decreasing population. This species has undergone a small or statistically insignificant decrease over the last 40 years in North America.



Diet: Omnivorous; insects and some seed.

Brown-headed Cowbirds feed on the ground in mixed-species groups of blackbirds and starlings. Males gather on lawns to strut and display for mates. Females prowl woodlands and edges in search of nests. Brown-headed Cowbirds are noisy, making a multitude of clicks, whistles and chatter-like calls in addition to a flowing, gurgling song.

It usually forages in family groups; at times found in flocks of up to 50 individuals.

Breeding: Sexes are sexually dimorphic. Male cowbirds have glossy black plumage and a rich brown head that often looks black in poor lighting or at distance. Female cowbirds are plain brown birds, lightest on the head and underparts, with fine streaking on the belly and a dark eye

It is North America's most common "brood parasite." A female cowbird makes no nest of her own, but instead lays her eggs in the nests of other bird species, who then raise the young cowbirds. It lay eggs in the nests of more than 220 species of birds. Recent genetic analyses have shown that most individual females specialize on one particular host species. Cowbird eggs hatch faster than other species eggs, giving cowbird nestlings a head start in getting food from the parents. Young cowbirds also develop at a faster pace than their nest mates, and they sometimes toss out eggs and young nestlings or smother them in the bottom of the nest.

Cool Facts: Some birds, such as the Yellow Warbler, can recognize cowbird eggs but are too small to get the eggs out of their nests. Instead, they build a new nest over the top of the old one and hope cowbirds don't come back. Some larger species puncture or grab cowbird eggs and throw them out of the nest. But the majority of hosts don't recognize cowbird eggs at all.

Common Name: Shiny Cowbird
Scientific Name: *Molothrus bonariensis*)

Size: 7.1 inches (18 cm)

Habitat: North America; it breeds in most of South America except for dense forests and areas of high altitude such as mountains. Since 1900, this cowbird's range has shifted northward, and it was recorded in the Caribbean islands as well as the United States, where it is found breeding in southern Florida.

It is a bird associated with open habitats, including disturbed land from agriculture and deforestation.



Status: Least Concern. **Global Population:** Unknown number of mature individuals with an increasing population. Both deforestation and suburbanization may increase habitat for Shiny Cowbirds. They thrive in agricultural areas with planted grains and livestock, gathering at feedlots to eat spilled feed. Shiny Cowbirds are brood parasites and could reduce populations of species of conservation concern in the mainland United States as they expand their range—as has happened in Puerto Rico with the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird and Puerto Rican Vireo.

Diet: Omnivorous; insects and some seed.

Brown-headed Cowbirds feed on the ground in mixed-species groups of blackbirds and starlings. Males gather on lawns to strut and display for mates.

Females prowl woodlands and edges in search of nests. Brown-headed Cowbirds are noisy, making a multitude of clicks, whistles and chatter-like calls in addition to a flowing, gurgling song.

Shiny Cowbirds forage in flocks, often with other blackbird species. They feed mostly on the ground, searching for seeds, grains, and insects. Males sing a gurgling song and display to females in the air, from a tree, or on the ground.

Breeding: Sexes are sexually dimorphic. Adult males appear blackish from a distance; in good light they are velvety purple. Adult females are brown overall with a pale eyebrow and throat. Juveniles are also brownish but heavily streaked below, similar to juvenile Brown-headed Cowbirds.

Like most other cowbirds, it is an obligate brood parasite, laying its eggs in the nests of many other bird species such as the rufous-collared sparrow. Different host species show different responses to their nests being parasitized, with behaviors ranging from accepting and caring for the cowbird eggs, to rejecting the eggs from the nest. As the shiny cowbird is an effective generalist brood parasite, it can be considered the South American counterpart to the brown-headed cowbird.

Cool Facts: The shiny cowbird was formally described in 1789 by the German naturalist Johann Friedrich Gmelin in his revised and expanded edition of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*. He placed it with the tanagers in the genus *Tangara* and coined the binomial name *Tanagra bonariensis*. The shiny cowbird is now one of six cowbirds placed in the genus *Molothrus* that was introduced in 1832 by William Swainson.

Seven subspecies are recognized:

- *M. b. minimus*. First reported by Dalmas in 1900. This race is found in south Florida (southeast United States), West Indies, the Guianas and north Brazil.
- *M. b. cabanisii*. First reported by Cassin in 1866. This race is found in east Costa Rica to west Colombia.
- *M. b. venezuelensis*. First reported by Stone in 1891. This race is found in east Colombia and north Venezuela
- *M. b. aequatorialis*. First reported by Chapman in 1915. This race is found in southwest Colombia and west Ecuador
- *M. b. occidentalis*. First reported by Berlepsch & Stolzmann in 1892. This race is found in southwest Ecuador and west Peru
- *M. b. riparius*. First reported by Griscom & Greenway in 1937. This race is found in east Ecuador, east Peru and west Brazil
- *M. b. bonariensis*. First reported by Gmelin in 1789. The nominate race is found in central, east Brazil to central Chile, Bolivia and central south Argentina.

Common Name: Bronzed Cowbird
Scientific Name: *Molothrus aeneus*

Size: 7.3-7.9 inches (18.5–20 cm)

Habitat: North America; they breed within the United States (states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana) south through Central America to Panama.

They tend to be found in farmland, brush, and feedlots. Outside the breeding season, they are found in very open habitats, and roost in thick woods. These birds forage in open areas, often near cattle in pastures.

Status: Least Concern. **Global Population:** Unknown number of mature individuals with a decreasing population. This species has undergone a small or statistically insignificant decrease over the last 40 years in North America.



Diet: Omnivorous; seeds and insects, along with snails during breeding season for a calcium source.

It forages in flocks, mostly on the ground, searching for seeds, grains, and insects. Males perform a remarkable “helicopter” display to females.

Breeding: Sexes are sexually dimorphic. The male bronzed cowbird has green-bronze, gloss-black plumage. His eyes are red in breeding season and brown

otherwise. The female is a dull black with a brown underbelly. Young birds have coloring similar to the females, with the exception of grey feather fringes.

Like all cowbirds, this bird is an obligate brood parasite; it lays its eggs in the nests of other birds. The young cowbird is fed by the host parents at the expense of their own young. Hosts include Prevost's ground-sparrows and white-naped brush finches. They develop rapidly, leaving the nest after 10–12 days.

Cool Facts: It is also known as the Red-eyed Cowbird. There are three subspecies:

- *M. a. loyei*. First reported by Parkes & Blake in 1965. It is found in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. It is the largest of the subspecies.
- *M. a. assimilis*. First reported by Nelson in 1900. It is found in southwestern Mexico. It is similar to race *loyei* but smaller.
- *M. a. aeneus*. First reported by Wagler in 1829. The nominate subspecies is found in South Texas and from eastern Mexico to central Panama. It is smaller than the other races and the females are black.

Special Thanks to...

...my beta team

Alisa and FlintHawk

Species Accuracy and Reference Materials

Many birds of the same species do vary considerably in color. This package tries to emulate the colors and markings in the most commonly found variants.

The author-artist has tried to make these species as accurate to their real-life counterparts as possible. With the use of one generic model to create dozens of unique bird species, some give and take is bound to occur. The texture maps were created in Painter with as much accuracy as possible. Photographic references from photographs from various Internet searches and several field guides were used.

Field Guide Sources:

- **Wikipedia** (<http://www.wikipedia.com>)
- **Birdlife International** (<http://www.birdlife.org>)
- **Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive** (<https://www.hbw.com>)

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