

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD - MIMUS POLYGLOTTOS

Taxonomy: Kingdom: Animalia Phylum: Chordata Class: Aves Order: Passeriformes Family: Mimidae Genus: Mimus
Species: M. polyglottos

Habitat:

Biomes: Year-round the Northern Mockingbird is found in areas with open ground and with shrubby vegetation like hedges, fruiting bushes, and thickets. When foraging on the ground, it prefers grassy areas, rather than bare spots. Common places to find Northern Mockingbirds include parkland, cultivated land, suburban areas and in second growth habitat at low elevations.

Distribution:

In US: The mockingbird's breeding range is from Maritime provinces of Canada westwards to British Columbia, practically the entire Continental United States south of the northern Plains states and Pacific northwest, and the majority of Mexico to eastern Oaxaca and Veracruz. The mockingbird is generally a year-round resident of its range, but the birds that live in the northern portion of its range have been noted further south during the winter season. The northern mockingbird breeds in southeastern Canada, the United States, northern Mexico, the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands and the Greater Antilles.

In Other Countries: NONE

Holistic Description: If you've been hearing an endless string of 10 or 15 different birds singing outside your house, you might have a Northern Mockingbird in your yard. These slender-bodied gray birds apparently pour all their color into their personalities. They sing almost endlessly, even sometimes at night, and they flagrantly harass birds that intrude on their territories, flying slowly around them or prancing toward them, legs extended, flaunting their bright white wing patches.

Species Richness: 3 SUBSPECIES

Population Dynamic: CHECK THREATS

Evolution and Systematics:

Evolution: NONE

Systematics: Generally larger and somewhat paler from east to west, but much individual variation in size and color. Whiter on underparts, tail, and inner primaries in Greater Antilles, s. Bahamas, and Cayman Islands.

Number of Species: 3 SUBSPECIES

Number of Genera: 3 SUBSPECIES

Physical Characteristics:

Size and Length: Length: 8.3-10.2 in (21-26 cm) Weight: 1.6-2.0 oz (45-58 g)

Wingspan: 12.2-13.8 in (31-35 cm)

Coloration: Mockingbirds are overall gray-brown, paler on the breast and belly, with two white wingbars on each wing. A white patch in each wing is often visible on perched birds, and in flight these become large white flashes. The white outer tail feathers are also flashy in flight.

General Body Features: A medium-sized songbird, a bit more slender than a thrush and with a longer tail. Mockingbirds have small heads, a long, thin bill with a hint of a downward curve, and long legs. Their wings are short, rounded, and broad, making the tail seem particularly long in flight.

Special Features of the Body: NONE

Special Features of the Head and Sensory Organs: NONE

Dentition: BEAK/LAMELLAE/GIZZARD

Special Features of the Limbs and Digits: MIMIC CALLS.

Any Special Internal Anatomy: Bacteria aid mockingbirds survival because they are a large component in the Nitrogen Cycle and Carbon Cycle, which are both essential elements for a mockingbird to live and function.

Sexual Dimorphisms: Males generally heavier than females, but sexes not safely separated by size or plumage. Legs and tail long, wings rather short and rounded.

Differences Between Juvenile Stage and Adult: Juvenile: grey, and largely similar to adult, breast spotted, and underparts slightly buff. Eye color darkish; iris of adults is brighter yellow.

Behavior:

Diurnal, Nocturnal, or Crepuscular: Diurnal

Activity: Northern Mockingbirds are found alone or in pairs throughout the year. They make themselves easily visible, sitting and singing atop shrubs, trees, utility lines, fences, and poles. On the ground they walk, run, and hop along the ground, tail cocked upwards, grabbing at prey on the ground or snatching insects just over the grass. Mockingbirds sometimes fly up and hover to grab at hanging fruit. The Northern Mockingbird is aggressive throughout the year. Females typically fend off other female mockingbirds, while males confront male intruders. Males disputing territory boundaries fly toward each other, land

near the boundary, and face off, silently hopping from one side to another. Eventually, one bird retreats and the other chases it a short ways. If neither bird retreats, they may fly at each other, grappling with wings and claws and pecking at each other. Mockingbirds are also territorial around other bird species as well as dogs and cats. The flight style of mockingbirds is variable but typically leisurely, with showy wingbeats. Sometimes Northern Mockingbirds simply drop quickly from a perch with their wings folded.

Locomotion: Walks, runs, and hops on the ground. Hops adroitly, even through dense foliage. Occasionally clings to tree trunks, like a woodpecker, when preying on arthropods on trunks. When walking or running on the ground, frequently raises wings (“wing flashes”) half to fully open in a stereotyped manner, in several progressively higher jerky movements, exposing conspicuous white wing patch.

Communication and Perception: Both male and female mockingbirds sing. They often mimic the sounds of birds (and frogs) around them, including shrikes, blackbirds, orioles, killdeer, jays, hawks, and many others. They go on learning new sounds throughout their lives. The song is a long series of phrases, with each phrase repeated 2-6 times before shifting to a new sound; the songs can go on for 20 seconds or more. Many of the phrases are whistled, but mockingbirds also make sharp rasps, scolds, and trills. Unmated males are the most insistent singers, carrying on late all day and late into the night. Brown Thrashers have a similar song, but the phrases are less varied and most are delivered just 2-3 times. Gray Catbirds can also sound similar, but their phrases are more nasal, hurried, and slurred.

Home Range: Highly territorial; pairs usually defend territories together, each member defending against intruding mockingbirds of the same sex. Territorial year-round, defending all-purpose territories. In s. Florida, territorial defense in fall is strong but less effective in excluding intruders as density of wandering juveniles is high.

Degree of Sociality: Adults spend most or all of the year in pairs, although male-biased adult sex ratios result in significant numbers of unmated males. Many unmated adult males are also territorial. Females sometimes hold fall-winter territories by themselves, although apparently not in s. Florida.

Level of Aggression: Chases of conspecific territorial intruders is common, especially during the breeding season. In northern portions of the range, where breeding and nonbreeding territories are often different, such chases are more frequent early in territorial establishment during both spring and fall. Intruders most frequently fly back to their own territories, although fights do occur. Supplanting an intruder from perches in trees within the territory may also occur before a rapid chase. Chases are either silent or accompanied by chats, chat-bursts, or hew calls, but seldom song.

Migration: Resident.

Predators:

Predators: Hawks, Owls, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Screech Owls, Scrub Jays, Great Horned Owl, Cats, Red-tailed Hawks, Crows, Blue Jays, Fish Crows, American Crows, Swallow-tailed Kites, Snakes, Squirrels, Cats.

Anti-Predator Defenses: Adults give alarm calls (hew calls, chat calls, and high-pitched cries) in the presence of nest predators, and mob and actively pursue predators, sometimes striking them.

Diet and Nutrition:

Adult Diet: Northern Mockingbirds eat mainly insects in summer but switch to eating mostly fruit in fall and winter. Among their animal prey are beetles, earthworms, moths, butterflies, ants, bees, wasps, grasshoppers, and sometimes small lizards. They eat a wide variety of berries, including from ornamental bushes, as well as fruits from multiflora rose. They’ve been seen drinking sap from the cuts on recently pruned trees.

Juvenile Diet: Nestlings are fed a mixture of arthropods (82% of feeding trips) and fruit (18%). Initially, nestlings are fed almost solely arthropods: spiders and insects (dragonflies, grasshoppers and crickets, beetles, moths and butterflies, ants)

Special Adaptations for Getting Prey: Forages throughout the day and sometimes into crepuscular hours. In urban areas near bright lights, observed foraging until 23:30. Most arthropods taken by walking, running, or hopping along the ground. Typically, runs a short distance, stops, and lunges at prey on the ground. Also catches insects flying just above the ground. From a perch, flies down directly onto an arthropod at the ground surface, killing and dismembering prey there or carrying it back to the perch.

Reproduction:

Mode of Reproduction: Monogamous

Mating System: Monogamous, usually for the length of a breeding season, occasionally for life.

Mating Season: April to July

Courtship:

- (1) An acrobatic, swift flight through the territory, male chasing female, often accompanied by the exchange of soft hew calls.
- (2) A “flight display” is given from a high singing perch. A singing male jumps upward, flaps his wings once or several times, ascends a meter or two above the perch, and then parachutes down, wings open, onto the same or a nearby perch.

(3). When a female has newly arrived on a male's territory, he runs along shrub and tree branches, singing continuously, perhaps showing her potential nest sites.

Territoriality: HOME RANGE

Mating: All copulations observed have been on the ground, near a bush, or some other form of cover. Males sing before (from an elevated perch), during, and after copulation. The female, while on the ground below the male, may quiver her wings (solicitation display) before the male's descent to the ground. He lands and walks toward her before mounting. In one case, the female sang briefly before the male's descent, possibly matching his songs.

Nest Placement: Northern Mockingbirds nest in shrubs and trees, typically 3-10 feet off the ground but sometimes as high as 60 feet. The male probably chooses the nest site and begins building several nests before the female chooses one to finish and lay eggs in. Females may start laying in a second nest while the male is still caring for fledglings from the previous one. Northern Mockingbirds rarely ever reuse their nests.

Nest Description: Mockingbird nests consist of dead twigs shaped into an open cup, lined with grasses, rootlets, leaves, and trash, sometimes including bits of plastic, aluminum foil, and shredded cigarette filters. The male constructs the twig foundation while the female makes most of the lining.

Egg-Laying: Clutch Size: 2-6 eggs Number of Broods: 2-3 broods Egg Length: 0.8-1.1 in (2-2.9 cm) Egg Width: 0.6-0.8 in (1.6-2 cm) Incubation Period: 12-13 days Nestling Period: 12-13 days Egg Description: Pale blue or greenish white splotched with red or brown.

Hatching and Incubation/Gestation: Naked, blind, helpless with light gray down.

Development: Altricial (naked, blind, helpless at hatching) and nidicolous (remain in the nest until they can fly)

Parental Care: Both parents feed nestlings, bringing food items in bill throughout the day, with no differences between morning and afternoon feeding intensity.

Lifespan: Around 8 years.

Conservation:

Official Federal Status: Least Concern

Special Statuses in Individual States: NONE

Threats: Northern Mockingbird populations declined by about 21% percent from 1966 to 2015, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Partners in Flight estimates a global breeding population of 32 million with 83% in the U.S., 16% in Mexico, and 6% in Canada. The species rates an 8 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score and is not on the 2016 State of North America's Birds Report. Despite losses, Northern Mockingbirds are common and widespread and have rebounded from lows in the nineteenth century, when many were trapped or taken from nests and sold as cage birds.

Conservation Efforts: ^^^^^^^

Extra Facts:

1. It's not just other mockingbirds that appreciate a good song. In the nineteenth century, people kept so many mockingbirds as cage birds that the birds nearly vanished from parts of the East Coast. People took nestlings out of nests or trapped adults and sold them in cities such as Philadelphia, St. Louis, and New York, where, in 1828, extraordinary singers could fetch as much as \$50.
2. Northern Mockingbirds continue to add new sounds to their repertoires throughout their lives. A male may learn around 200 songs throughout its life.
3. The Northern Mockingbird frequently gives a "wing flash" display, where it half or fully opens its wings in jerky intermediate steps, showing off the big white patches. No one knows why it does this, but it may startle insects, making them easier to catch. On the other hand, it doesn't often seem to be successful, and different mockingbird species do this same display even though they don't have white wing patches.
4. Northern Mockingbirds sing all through the day, and often into the night. Most nocturnal singers are unmated males, which sing more than mated males during the day, too. Nighttime singing is more common during the full moon.
5. Northern Mockingbirds typically sing from February through August, and again from September to early November. A male may have two distinct repertoires of songs: one for spring and another for fall.
6. The female Northern Mockingbird sings too, although usually more quietly than the male does. She rarely sings in the summer, and usually only when the male is away from the territory. She sings more in the fall, perhaps to establish a winter territory.
7. The oldest Northern Mockingbird on record was at least 14 years, 10 months old when it was found in Texas.

Notable Species:

1. M. p. Polyglottos - Resident through much of North America, from s. Canada south to cen. Mexico and n. Bahamas.

2. M. p. Orpheus - Resident on Grand Cayman, Jamaica, Cuba (including Isle of Pines), Inagua (Bahamas), and Puerto Rico.
3. M. p. Dominicus - Resident on Hispaniola. Chest whitish; inner web of rectrix 4 white for at least half of length; white at base of primaries extensive, with innermost primary largely to completely white,