
Profile

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)

The Northern Mockingbird is renowned for its mimicking ability, as reflected by the meaning of its scientific name, 'many-tongued mimic.' It is the only mockingbird commonly found in North America and is mainly a permanent resident.

It has gray to brown upper feathers and a paler belly. Its wings have white patches which are visible in flight. Males and females look alike.

The mockingbird usually resides in fields and forest edges. It may be in farmlands, suburban areas, and any open grassy areas with thickets and brushy deserts. When foraging for food, it prefers short grass. It has an affinity for mowed lawns, so at Corkscrew, it will be mainly observed around the parking lot areas.

The Northern Mockingbird is an omnivore. It eats mostly insects in summer but switches to mostly fruit in fall and winter. Among animal prey are beetles, earthworms, moths, butterflies, ants, bees, grasshoppers, and sometimes small lizards. Adult Mockingbirds also have been seen drinking sap from the cuts on recently pruned trees.

These birds forage on the ground or in vegetation; they also fly down from a perch to capture food.

While foraging, they frequently spread their wings in a peculiar two-step motion to display the white patches.

There is disagreement among ornithologists about the primary reason for this behavior. It is used to get prey to reveal itself, and it is used by adults to intimidate an encountered predator.

Both the male and female of the species reach sexual maturity after one year of life. The breeding season occurs in the spring and early summer, and the species is monogamous, so once the pair forms they typically, al-



though not always, mate with each other for life.

Males arrive before the beginning of the season to establish their territories. They use a series of courtship displays to attract the females to their sites. They also recognize their breeding spots and return to areas in which they had greatest success in previous years. Urban birds are more likely to demonstrate this behavior.

Both the male and female are involved in the nest building. The male constructs the twig foundation while the female makes most of the lining. The nest is built approximately three to ten feet above the ground. The outer part of the nest is composed of twigs, while the inner part is lined with grasses, dead leaves, moss, or artificial fibers. The mockingbird does not nest in densely forested areas.

The female lays three to five eggs, which she incubates for nearly two weeks. Once the eggs are hatched, both the male and female feed the chicks.

Mockingbird pairs hatch from two to four broods a year. Eggs hatch after about 11 to 14 days of incubation, and after about 10 to 15 days of life, the offspring become independent.

The birds aggressively defend their nests and surrounding areas against other birds and animals.

When a predator is persistent, mockingbirds that are summoned by distinct calls from neighboring territories may join the attack. In addition to harassing domestic cats and dogs they consider a threat, they will also target humans.

The birds are absolutely unafraid and will attack much larger birds, even hawks.

The Northern Mockingbird is known for its intelligence. A 2009 study showed

that it was able to recognize individual humans, particularly noting those whom had previously been intruders or threats. It tended to ignore others with which it had no contact.

Northern Mockingbirds continue to add new sounds to their repertoires throughout their lives. An individual can learn up to 200 songs during its lifetime.

They don't just repeat other birdsongs randomly. It appears that males have separate sets of songs for the spring and fall seasons. In addition to bird songs, mockingbirds repeat dog barks, musical instruments, and sirens.

Calls are generally repeated three to five times before changing. The complexity and variety of one bird's calls indicate its maturity and experience. Only males sing regularly.

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. Night-time singing is more common around a full moon.

Finally, the mockingbird has influenced United States culture in multiple ways. The bird is a state bird of five states including Florida, has been used in book titles, and has been used in popular songs and lullabies.