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## Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

Symbol of the South and state bird of Florida, the Northern Mockingbird is known to most Floridians because of its persistent singing, bold nature, and ability to nest successfully near human habitation.

The Northern Mockingbird breeds throughout much of the United States, except for the most northern parts, south to Mexico, the Bahama Islands, and the Caribbean. In Florida, Mockingbirds nest throughout the mainland and the Keys.

**Habitat.** The versatile Northern Mockingbird occurs in a wide range of open or partly open habitats across the continent from forest edge and pasture fencerows to tree clumps in the prairies and cactus deserts in the southwest. It is abundant in suburban areas with densities reaching 400 pairs per 100 acres in St. Petersburg (Woolfenden and Rohwer 1969).

Mockingbirds eat a wide range of insects and spiders, crayfish, snails, and occasionally lizards and small snakes. During winter in the South they often defend locally abundant fruit or berry supplies from wandering flocks of American Robins or Cedar Waxwings.



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The bulky twig nest, lined with finer materials, is built by both sexes low in a dense bush or tree, often close to house. The eggs are pale blue-green and heavily spotted with reddish-brown. The average clutch size in Florida: 3 or 4 eggs (Woolfenden and Rohwer 1969); incubation lasts 12 to 13 days, and the young leave the nest at 11 to 12 days of age (Terres 1980, Ehrlich et al. 1988). The Northern Mockingbird is an infrequent host of the Brown-headed Cowbird (Friedmann 1963).

**Seasonal Occurrence.** The breeding season extends from February through August, but most nesting occurs late April to early May (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Mockingbirds are double or triple-brooded, and a pair that raised a brood per month in April, May, June, and July 1986 was reported from Sarasota County (Paul 1986). Mockingbirds become conspicuous in late summer and early fall with much chasing of other mockingbirds and with harsh calls (F. Lohrer, pers. obs.). This probably represents birds of the year trying to establish a permanent territory in a neighborhood of established territory holders. Locally, a seasonal shift in habitat may occur as individuals seek berry-rich winter territories (Halkain 1983). Nocturnal tower-kills in Leon County suggest that some individuals may be truly migratory, but in central Florida (Orange County) only 1 mockingbird was recorded in tower-kills (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

**Status.** The Northern Mockingbird is a permanent resident and nests throughout the state south to Key West, absent only from the western Everglades. It has been recorded in 93% (958) of all quadrangles in the state. The mockingbird's ability to nest throughout the state has been enhanced by the fragmentation and decrease of our forested lands. However, its numbers have declined steadily since the 1950s (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

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Sponsored by John D. MacDonald

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