

NESTING MOCKINGBIRDS IN THE LOWER DELAWARE VALLEY

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Within the past four or five years there has been an increase in numbers and nesting activities of Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) in the Collingswood and Palmyra, New Jersey, areas. These are located within a few miles of Camden, New Jersey, in the Delaware Valley. Although Mockingbirds are characteristically southern, they have been present in the Camden-Philadelphia area for many years. It is the purpose of this report to review some of the past records of their occurrence and to cite nesting data from a restricted area around Palmyra, New Jersey.

SOME RECORDS PREVIOUS TO 1900

According to Witmer Stone, (*The Birds of New Jersey, Their Nests and Eggs. Ann. Rept. N.J. State Museum. 1908*), Mockingbirds were more common in the early 19th century than in the early 20th century. Formerly they were much sought after as cage birds, due to their unusual singing ability. In fact, Philadelphians pursued them with such vigor that they were all but exterminated north of southern Delaware. They were considered fairly common winter visitants but rare summer residents. Nests were reported from Cape May in 1891, Englewood in 1876, and Barnegat in 1866. A colony was present at Sandy Hook in 1890.

In Pennsylvania, Stone (*Birds of Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey 1894*) considered the Mockingbird a rare find. He cited nesting data from Chester County by B. H. Warren in 1879 and one nest was reported by D. N. McCadden from Eagle, Pennsylvania, in 1880. Roberts and Hannum (*Nesting of the Mockingbird in Eastern Pennsylvania, Cassinia, Vol. 5:35-36, 1901*) found a nest, used for two broods in 1896, at Concordville, Delaware County.

From the information above, it can be concluded that the designation "rare" aptly describes the status of this species during the 19th century, in the Camden-Philadelphia area.

RECORDS FROM 1901 TO 1950

Mockingbird sight and nesting records for this period were assembled from unpublished field notes of the members of the Delaware Valley Orni-

thological Club of Philadelphia. The writer is especially indebted to Frank W. McLaughlin, who initiated this phase of the present study, gathering most of the notes from other members, as well as to R. F. Miller and J. K. Potter, whose records provided a substantial part of the material available. Field notes in *Cassinia* were also used in the compilation.

For the purpose of determining possible trends in population changes, the first half of the century has been divided into decades, giving sight and nesting records for New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This includes only southern New Jersey and Southeastern Pennsylvania (Table I).

TABLE I

Mockingbird sight records and nests reported by members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Period	Number of sight records		Number of nesting records	
	New Jersey	Pennsylvania	New Jersey	Pennsylvania
1901-1910	3	5	0	2
1911-1920	4	13	1	4
1921-1930	23	13	2	3
1931-1940	27	17	4	0
1941-1950	71	20	7	2
Totals	128	68	14	11

The numbers of sight records are not, of course, presented to indicate the actual populations present, but do give a picture of the rarity of this species. The highest count, 71, represents an average of about 7 records a year for the most recent period listed for New Jersey. The Pennsylvania records also indicate that Mockingbirds were rarely seen. The increase during the period from 1941 to 1950 in New Jersey was pronounced. Part, but certainly not all, of this may be due to increased field coverage by a larger number of Club members.

Nesting records were extremely rare (Table I), with only 25 submitted for the 50 year period. J. A. Gillespie published a note on the finding of a nest in Folcroft, Delaware County, in 1921 (Mockingbird Nesting in Pennsylvania. *Auk*, Vol. 47:262. 1930). Wharton Huber found one in Mt. Moriah Cemetery, also in Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Mockingbird Nesting Just Outside the Limits of Philadelphia. *Auk*, Vol. 46:554. 1929). Nesting records for New Jersey, in addition to those listed in Table I, include the published records of Stone (Bird Studies at Old Cape May. Vol. II. 1937) citing nests for the years 1917, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1932, and 1933. Mockingbirds were listed as rare, but expected throughout the year by Choate (A Field List of Birds of

Cape May County, New Jersey. *Cape May Geographic Society*. 1950. By E. A. Choate.). Care was taken in the present compilation to avoid duplication of records by checking place and date information from each contributor.

Sight and nesting records were assembled geographically and were found to cover all parts of the area represented, with sight records in each of the 13 counties, and nesting records in 9 of these (Table II).

Table II.

Geographic distribution of reported Mockingbird sight and nesting records in Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey, from 1901 to 1950.

State and County	No. of Sight Records	Representative locations. Asterisk indicates that nesting was observed
<i>Pennsylvania</i>		
Bucks	13	New Hope*, Doylestown, Feasterville
Chester	13	Jannersville*, Kennett Square*, Paoli
Delaware	19	Folcroft*, Ardmore, Essington, Tincum
Montgomery	9	Ambler, Conshohocken, Jeffersonville
Philadelphia	14	Elmwood*, Fairmount Park, Frankford, Roxboro
Total	<u>68</u>	
<i>New Jersey</i>		
Atlantic	8	Pleasantville*, Brigantine, Egg Harbor
Burlington	19	Bridgeboro*, Moorestown, Mt. Holly, Palmyra
Camden	33	Haddonfield*, Collingswood, Delair
Cape May	35	Cape May*, Stone Harbor
Cumberland	7	Bridgeton, Vineland
Gloucester	12	Woodbury*, Bridgeport, Pennsgrove
Ocean	3	Barneгат, Beach Haven, Seaside Park
Salem	11	Fort Mott, Marshalltown, Salem
Total	<u>128</u>	

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MOCKINGBIRD COLONY

With the background of comparative rarity in occurrence and in nesting up to recent years, it was a pleasant surprise to find increasing numbers of Mockingbirds appearing locally. A search for nests was made in 1953 within the limits of the Boroughs of Palmyra, Riverton, and of Cinnaminson Township, comprising an area of approximately nine square miles. One side of this area borders the Delaware river. Within the area, known as the Triborough, 16 nests were located, 27 adults and 13 young were observed in 1953. Records were then obtained and assembled for nesting in the two previous years. The survey was continued in 1954, visiting the previously

used nesting sites, and new locations were found with resident Mockingbirds.

A summary of the survey is given in Table III. Mockingbirds were present or nested at 2 locations in 1951, 4 in 1952, 13 in 1953, and 14 in 1954. Other locations may have been missed. In 1954, nests were located at most of the places where pairs had been present in previous years, indicating strong territorial behavior, and it seems probable that nesting will continue in succeeding years. At locations 1, 6, and 7 (Table III) in 1954, time did not permit looking for nests in early summer, but the pairs were present frequently.

When the nesting sites were plotted on a map of the area, it was found that $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile separated them in any given direction, in practically all cases. Two pairs, however, were nesting within a hundred feet of each other at location 5. It is not known how much territory local Mockingbirds will demand but it was noted that all sites had nearby open fields or gardens, allowing room for feeding, without interference from other "mockers".

Table III.
Mockingbird census in the Triborough area, 1951-1954

Locations	Number of nests found, adults or adult pairs observed.			
	1951	1952	1953	1954
1. Union Landing Road	1	1	pair	pair
2. Parry Ave. and Wallace St.	adult	adult	1	pair
3. Lejeune Road		1	2	2
4. Farm #2, Campbell Soup Co.		1	1	3
5. Steele's Nursery			2	5
6. Leach's Nursery			2	pair
7. Washington Ave., 1000 block			2	pair
8. Riverton Road (Cinn. Home)			1	1
9. Rowland Street (E. Riverton)			1	1
10. Cedar St. and 9th			1	pair
11. Riverton Road and Pomona Rd.			1	1
12. Church Road and Pomona Road			adult	2
13. West end, Spring Gardent St.			2	1
14. Woodside Lane				1
	—	—	—	—
Total territories	2	4	13	14
Total nests observed	1	3	16	17
Total adults observed	3	7	27	36

It was not possible to follow the success or failure of each nesting venture. Clutch size varied from 3 to 6, with the former number being the most common. Six young were hatched and left the nest, in one case. Cats were common predators, and in one location they destroyed the eggs in two nests in

succession, perhaps in retaliation for persistent deviling by the Mockingbirds. Two broods were raised at several locations, and in each case a new nest was built for the second clutch. Eggs were laid between May 8th and July 15th.

Nests were located within 25 to 50 feet of a house in over half of the sites found, and were from 4 to 8 feet from the ground. Nests were built in small trees of peach, holly, spruce, willow oak, and pin oak. Others were in grape arbors, small shrubs or hedges, rose bushes or honeysuckle growths. The birds fed on small insects, berries, and fruit.

An indication of the "newness" of the birds to the area is the fact that very few people in the Triborough recognized them as Mockingbirds. Some complaint was made that the birds would sing at night, waking the family. Rooftops, chimneys, and television antennae were common singing perches. No outstanding mimics have been heard, but some appeared to be imitating songs or calls of the Cardinal, Wood Thrush, Blue Jay, Flicker or Crested Flycatcher, all resident in the area.

DISCUSSION

It was previously thought by the writer that the establishment of a species in a given area as a permanent resident would take many years. In the present case, it was possible to watch the development of this "colony" of Mockingbirds within the short span of three or four years.

An interesting pattern took place in the establishment of a nesting site at one location (Table III, Location 2). A single bird appeared at a neighbor's backyard feeding station in Palmyra in the winter of 1951-1952, and occasionally during the summer of 1952. During this period it sang very rarely. It became fairly tame and would almost accept raisins from the hand. In the winter of 1952-1953, two birds fed at the station, one obviously the "tame" bird, and in 1953 a nest was built nearby in a grapevine arbor and three young were hatched. The male sang loud and frequently during this summer. The young were fed in the area during June, then disappeared until October, when the pair returned to feed. They were occasionally joined by a third Mockingbird during the winter. The earliest sight record found for a Mockingbird in the Triborough was in 1941 when one was seen by Harvey Moore at Leach's Nursery (Table III, Location 6).

It is believed that the pattern of territory establishment described may be typical of the primary increase taking place here and probably in other localities in the state: that is, individual males appearing in the winter, probably visiting many feeding locations, and later, mating and returning

to a suitable place to nest. Stone (loc. cit., 1937) stated that young Mockingbirds usually scatter and become hermits during the winter.

It is probable that new nesting sites were established within the Triborough area from two main sources. One is from the local nesting increase and the other is from adjacent areas to the south. In Collingswood, New Jersey, area, approximately 9 miles south of Palmyra, the records of F. W. McLaughlin show 1 nest in 1949, 2 in 1950, and 4 in 1951. These were in the nearby Newton Creek and Cooper River Parkways.

The above increase preceded in time that in the Triborough and may well have supplied some of the newcomers. In Delair, New Jersey, which lies between Collingswood and the Triborough, Mockingbirds have been seen for many years, but no nesting records are available. In this vicinity, Lawrence R. Corn saw 12 individuals in one scattered group in the fall of 1950.

It has been observed in this survey that winter records of Mockingbirds are more numerous than those at other seasons. It was listed as a winter resident by Marshall (Birds of the Philadelphia Region and Nearby Seacoast. E. W. Marshall, 574 Warwick Rd., Haddonfield, N.J., 1938). In view of the fact that the main nesting area is to the south, a short migratory pattern, north in winter and south in summer seems indicated. Bent (U. S. Nat'l Museum Bull. 195, 1948) states that the Mockingbird is generally nonmigratory, but that in some sections (unspecified) may appear to be migratory.

F. C. Lincoln (The Migration of American Birds. 1939) stated "a mocker banded at Haddonfield, New Jersey, on November 25, 1932 was found dead at Shadyside, Maryland, May 25, 1935". Although "one Swallow doesn't make a summer", this instance proves the southward migration phase to be possible and it is entirely probable that the bird had originally come from Maryland.

In order to determine the facts concerning the possibilities of migratory movements of Mockingbirds, both within the states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania and between them and the South, banding should be started.

CONCLUSIONS

A comparatively rare phenomenon, the establishment of a bird species as a new resident, has been observed from its beginning, covering a period of 4 years. The long period in which Mockingbirds have been rare in the Camden-Philadelphia area may be at an end. It seems entirely possible that the rapid buildup of nesting pairs in the Palmyra, New Jersey vicinity, for example, may be typical of similar increases in other localities in this area. The fact that nesting took place in 14 locations within a 9 square mile area, indicates adaptability of Mockingbirds to local environmental conditions. It is possible that one or more severe winters could reduce the population of resident pairs, but the likelihood is good that Mockingbirds are here to stay.
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