



## Wildlife Window – The Northern Mockingbird Florida's State Bird. With Songs and Sounds Galore.

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*“Everybody have you heard? He's gonna buy me a mockingbird.  
And if that mockingbird won't sing, He's gonna buy me a diamond ring.”*  
(Music written by Charlie James & Inez Foxx)

Sorry, no diamond rings for Rivendell. As you have heard, our Mockingbird populations are thriving here and singing their songbook with regularity and gusto.

Florida designated the Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) as the official state bird in 1927. The mockingbird is a superb songbird and beloved mimic. (Hence the name “mocking” bird.) Its own song has a pleasant lilting sound and is, at times, both varied and repetitive. Often, the mockingbird sings all night long, especially under bright springtime moonlight (during breeding season). Mockingbirds have extraordinary vocal abilities - they can sing up to 200 songs, including the songs of other birds, insect and amphibian sounds (even an occasional mechanical and siren sounds).

### **Let's learn more about these Mockingbirds.**

Northern Mockingbirds are about ten inches in length, with a fifteen-inch wingspan, grayish upper portions, white undersides, and white patches on the tail and wings. The female has slightly less whiteness in its feathers than the male. The white patches on a mockingbird's wings and outer tail feathers serve dual purposes: these birds often show off their plumes during mating rituals, plus they also flash them when defending their territory from potential predators like hawks and snakes.

The mockingbird is helpful to humans because it usually feeds on insects and weed seeds. In the summer and fall, it also eats ripe berries. Mockingbirds have easily adapted to human development, taking up residence across suburban towns and cities. Wide-open lawns and parks are perfect for hunting their insect prey, and males often sing from perches like the tops of houses and telephone poles, where their performance can involve leaping into the air and fluttering back down.

The nest, a joint project of the male and female mockingbird, is a bulky, open cup of grass, twigs, and rootlets carelessly arranged in a dense tree or bush. The three to six eggs per nest are a pale blue-green with brown spots. Mockingbirds are prolific breeders with as many as seven nesting attempts during a breeding season. This year-round Florida resident is known for its fierce defense of the family nest.



(Photo: Bob Frank)

**Fun Facts:** Not only a Florida favorite, the Mockingbird is also the state bird of Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas and one of the few birds found in every kind of habitat, from desert to forest to city. Plus, did you know... a Mockingbird sighting is considered a good omen in many cultures.