

Northern Mockingbird

Mimus polyglottos

Another southern species that has spread northward during the past 100 years (DeVos 1964), Northern Mockingbirds are currently well established members of Ohio's breeding avifauna. They apparently expanded into Ohio during the 19th century. Jones (1903) claimed they were rare residents in the early 1900s with scattered records north to Columbus. Reports from the northern counties were considered to be escapes, although some of these sightings may have been legitimate vagrants.

This population noticeably expanded during the first decades of the 20th century. Hicks (1935) cited breeding records from 59 counties. He noted they regularly nested north through Darke, Shelby, Logan, Union, Delaware, Licking, Coshocton, Tuscarawas, Harrison, and Jefferson counties, but became very rare and locally distributed in the northern counties. They were apparently most numerous in the southeastern counties, especially Adams, Lawrence, Gallia, Guernsey, Morgan, Muskingum, and Noble.

This population slowly increased during subsequent decades, particularly in southwestern Ohio after 1945 (Mathena et al. 1984). Despite their appearance at Lake St. Mary's in 1948 and increased numbers in Carroll and Jefferson counties during the 1950s (Buchanan 1980, Clark and Sipe 1970), their expansion into northern Ohio stalled. Northern Mockingbirds are susceptible to mortality during harsh winter weather, and the normal winter climate in the northern counties is apparently too harsh for this species. Additionally, severe winter weather can decimate their numbers throughout the state. The most recent example of weather-induced mortality occurred during the winters of 1976–1978 which virtually eliminated mockingbirds from northern Ohio and greatly reduced their numbers elsewhere. Their populations recovered during the 1980s, a trend evident throughout the Atlas Project.

The Atlas Project produced records from 413 priority blocks (54.1% of the statewide total) within a breeding range similar to that reported by Hicks (1935). This species is currently widely distributed north through Darke, Shelby, Logan, Union, southern Morrow, Knox, Holmes, Tuscarawas, and Columbiana counties. They remain rare and very locally distributed in northern Ohio where they were unrecorded in nine counties, but were more widespread than the few reports of Hicks (1935). Mockingbirds are most widely distributed in the Illinoian Till Plain with records from every priority block. Their representation declined to 68.9 and 56.1% of the blocks in the Unglaciated Plateau and Till Plain regions respectively, becoming locally distributed in the northern portions of both regions. They were recorded in 35.7% of the blocks in the Glaciated Plateau region with most of the reports concentrated near the unglaciated counties. They are locally distributed throughout the Lake Plain region with records from 20.0% of the priority blocks.

Breeding Bird Survey data indicates a similar pattern of relative abundance in Ohio. Mockingbirds are most numerous in the Illinoian Till Plain region, more than three times as abundant as in the Unglaciated Plateau and Till Plain regions.

They are very infrequently found on surveys in the other physiographic regions.

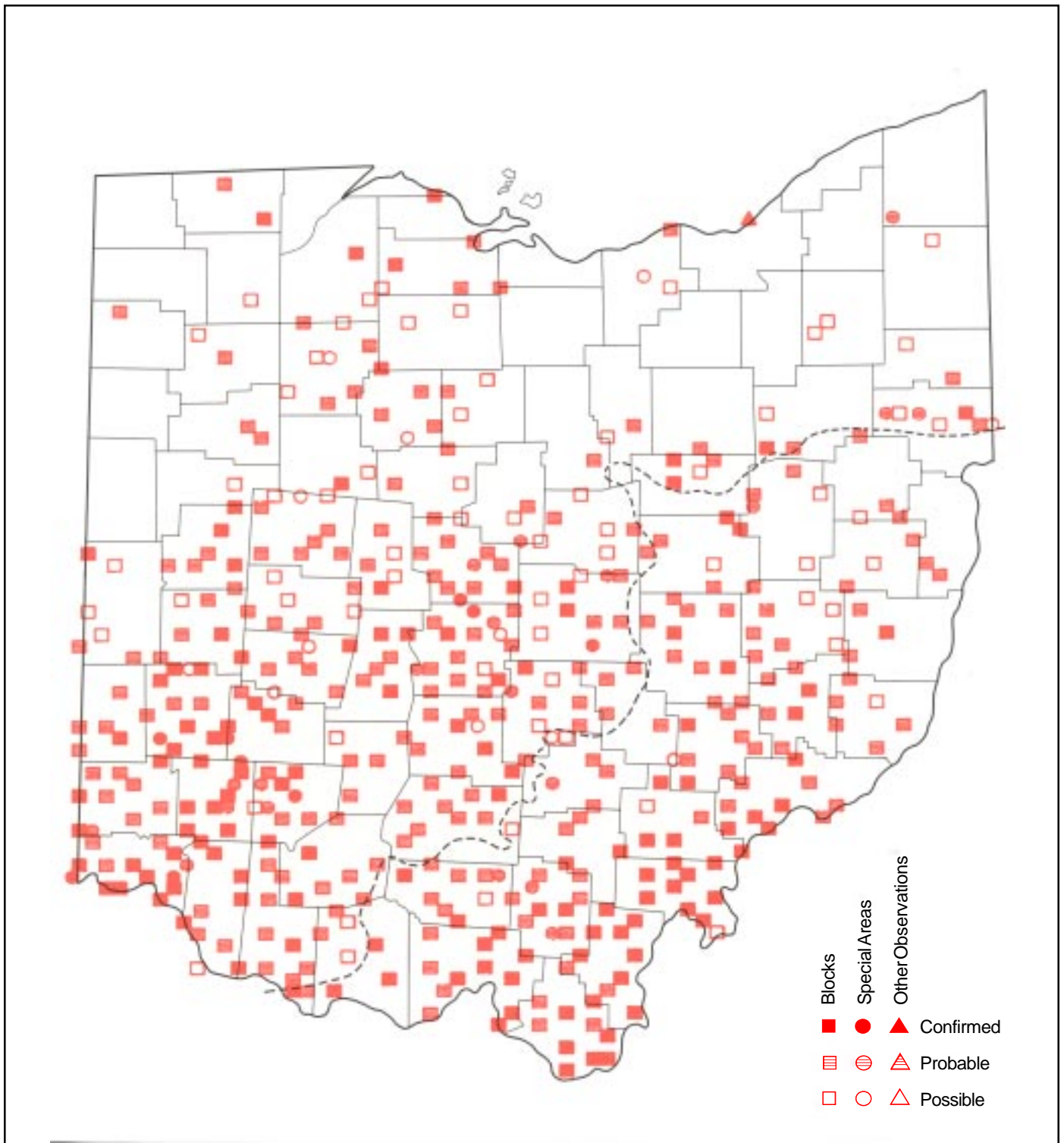
Probable breeders composed slightly more than one-half of the Atlas Project records, primarily territorial males. Of the 131 confirmed records in priority blocks, there were 35 reports of active nests, adults carrying food for young were noted in 27 blocks, and recently fledged young were discovered in 17 blocks. The "30" code was used to confirm breeding in 47 blocks, primarily in the Unglaciated Plateau region (30 blocks).



Alvin E. Staffan

While nesting mockingbirds occupy a variety of habitats, the common denominator appears to be the presence of dense brushy thickets bordering residences and open fields. They exhibit a preference for hedgerows composed of multiflora rose and osage-orange as well as fields dotted with multiflora rose thickets and other thorny shrubs (Hicks 1935, Trautman 1940). They are rarely found far from human habitations and seldom occupy territories near water.

Mockingbird nests are normally placed in shrubby thickets and dense young trees at heights of seven feet or less. Campbell (1968) cited an unusual nesting attempt in a Purple Martin house. Their nests are difficult to locate and data on their breeding chronology in Ohio is sparse. Most pairs raise two broods annually, and some may raise three. Published egg dates extend between May 10 and August 2, although reports of recently fledged young as early as June 4 and as late as November 16 indicate some clutches are produced before and after these dates (Peterjohn 1989a, Trautman 1940, Petersen 1967). In general, first clutches are normally laid during May and these young fledge between June 15 and July 5. Second clutches are laid during late June and early July and these young fledge between July 25 and August 20.



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

| Physiographic Region | Total Blocks Surveyed | Blocks with Data | % with Data | Regional % for Ohio | Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------|--|
| Lake Plain | 95 | 19 | 20.0 | 4.6 | 0.2 |
| Till Plain | 271 | 152 | 56.1 | 36.8 | 3.9 |
| Ill. Till Plain | 46 | 46 | 100.0 | 11.1 | 12.8 |
| Glaciated Plateau | 140 | 50 | 35.7 | 12.1 | – |
| Unglaciated Plateau | 212 | 146 | 68.9 | 35.4 | 4.1 |

Summary of Breeding Status

| No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded | | |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Total | 413 | 54.1% |
| Confirmed | 131 | 31.7% |
| Probable | 216 | 52.3% |
| Possible | 66 | 16.0% |