

Behavioral Notes on Mockingbirds And Black Rat Snakes

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The recent report of wing flashing by a Catbird in response to a Black Rat Snake (E.F. Potter, *Chat*, 32:103) prompts me to report a similar incident. On 17 May 1969 I observed unusual behavior by a Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*) about 100 yards E of Sandy Point on the Patuxent River, Calvert County, Maryland. The Mockingbird was wing flashing and fluttering a few feet off the ground and rapidly approaching me. At a distance of perhaps 50 feet I could discern the object of the bird's attention, an adult Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*). I detected no vocalization on the part of the Mockingbird. A Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) from a nearby housebox was attracted by the commotion, but did not take part in the wing flashing. The birds broke off the engagement as the snake continued towards me.

It is of interest that Potter observed this type of behavior by the Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) and what might be called "incipient" behavior by a Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*). The present observation represents a third species of the Mimidae.

A second point of interest is that the Black Rat Snake harassed by the Mockingbird was the third I had observed that morning and each, insofar as I could tell, followed the same path from a low, swampy area through a lawn (recently converted from a cornfield). This is strong circumstantial evidence for "tracking," presumably by olfaction, of the first snake by the latter two. A previous observation of this type was made by Stupka (J.E. Huheey and A. Stupka, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, Univ. of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1967, p. 64). Stupka's observation was on 15 May 1953 coinciding remarkably with mine and with the known breeding season of this species (K.P. Schmidt and D.D. Davis, *Field Book of Snakes*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1941, p. 150, give May 25 and June 19; A.H. Wright and A.A. Wright, *Handbook of Snakes of the United States and Canada*, Vol. I, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1957, p. 233, state "May 25 . . . to June 12 . . ."). The snakes were collected, preserved, and examined internally. The first snake was a female and the following two were males, consistent with the trailing hypothesis.

Spring Movement and Behavior Of Loggerhead Shrikes at Raleigh, N.C.

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For a number of permanent resident species that do not congregate during migration, and are generally thinly distributed at all times of year, it is difficult to ascertain migratory movements except in closely monitored areas. The Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) is such a species.

During the winter 1968-1969, I was conducting a study of the bird populations of a suburban area of Raleigh. Observation and mist-netting failed to reveal the presence of any shrikes in my study area (about 65 acres).

On 3 and 4 March five Loggerhead Shrikes appeared in the area. The first, a single bird, suddenly appeared in my yard on 3 March. I was banding birds and had one 12 m net open. I left the net for about 10 minutes. On returning, I discovered the shrike perched on top of the net. I watched it while it then made an attack on a Slate-colored

Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) in the net. The junco gave a distress call, and I intervened before the shrike could harm it. The shrike left, but to my chagrin I discovered 2 dead Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) in the net. The shrike had killed them in my brief absence. I then removed all live birds from the net and waited for the shrike. In 5 minutes it returned and made three more passes at one of the dead siskins. It hit the siskin with its feet, but when the siskin stayed in the net, the shrike fell back to the ground and sat for several seconds, and then flew off. Twice again it hit the siskin, and failing to dislodge it, flew up in a pecan tree nearby. The shrike then left the immediate area. An hour later, it returned and managed to behead one siskin in the net. I saw it fly off with the head. A half hour later it returned, but didn't make a pass, although it perched in the pecan and seemed to watch the net. It stayed in the general area another 15 minutes, and its presence was accompanied by the scolding of chickadees, goldfinches, House Sparrows (about 15 formed a flock and followed the shrike about at a distance), Robins, Mockingbirds (who didn't chase the shrike), and Downy Woodpeckers, who got the closest to the perched shrike, although they kept behind branches.

On 4 March Micou Browne and I saw two Loggerhead Shrikes at Lake Boone, also in the study area and near my yard. One shrike was captured in a mist net when it attempted to capture a White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). It had already succeeded in dispatching a Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) in the net. This shrike was collected. It was a female (ova 10 mm x 4 mm) *L.l. ludovicianus*. This is the resident race in Wake County, although this is near the northern edge of its range. After 10 March no more shrikes were seen in the area. This indicates that there is an early March movement of this race, probably of birds breeding slightly to the north.

Some points may be made about the behavior of Loggerhead Shrikes around mist-netted birds: 1) When the shrike was unable to extract killed prey, its attention switched to other netted birds; 2) Shrikes killed netted birds by biting into the neck and base of skull; 3) The shrike made repeated attempts to dislodge prey, and returned as much as 1 hour later; 4) The shrike took away part of the victim when it could not get the whole carcass.

I want to thank Roxie Laybourne of the Smithsonian Institution, who made the subspecific identification of the shrike.

A Seasonal Change in Roosting Behavior

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During the winter of 1967-1968 I noticed that House Sparrows roosted in various deciduous trees in the fall, but did not roost in these same trees in the winter season.

Below are my notes, abbreviated, for the fall of 1968 describing changes in the roosting behavior of a mixed flock of House Sparrows and Starlings on the North Carolina State University campus.

1-13 October -- About 120 House Sparrows and 30 Starlings roosted in four of seven American elm trees (40 feet high) planted in a row next to the College Union. Individual birds would flit back and forth among the trees, continually chattering, until about ½ hour after sundown. I found no Starlings or sparrows roosting in nearby evergreens.

14 October -- First leaf coloration noted in elms. No change in bird behavior.

21 October -- One third of leaves are in full color and some leaf-fall is evident. No change in bird behavior.

28 October -- All leaves colored, 1/3 of leaves have fallen (visual estimate). No change in bird behavior.

4 November -- One half of the leaves have fallen. There appears to be more