

Mockingbird



If you live anywhere in the southern two-thirds of the United States, the mockingbird is likely a familiar sight. While the mockingbird is certainly a handsome bird, it's not its looks that make it remarkable, but rather, its incredible vocal repertoire. The mockingbird is one of the most prolific songsters in the avian world. It can "sing" for hours on end from conspicuous perches on rooftops, telephone wires, or exposed branches. A clue to what really makes it unique among birds, however, is embedded in its name! Not only can it imitate the songs of other birds such as blue jays, killdeer, cardinals, and robins, but it can make "expert" imitations of car alarms, whistles, dogs barking, cats meowing, or any other range of everyday sounds. Often times, the mockingbird mixes in everyday sounds with its own warbles and calls, producing a bizarre chain of auditory wonders.

The mockingbird has actually played a role in American history. America's third president, Thomas Jefferson kept a mockingbird he named "Dick" as a pet. "Dick" was thought to be the first pet to live in the White House. Jefferson was known to be extremely fond of his pet, which he considered to be a superior to other birds. In the quote below, Jefferson congratulates a friend who had identified a mockingbird in her yard.

I sincerely congratulate you on the arrival of the Mocking bird. Learn all the children to venerate it as a superior being in the form of a bird, or as a being which will haunt them if any harm is done to itself or it's eggs. I shall hope that the multiplication of the cedar in the neighborhood, and of trees and shrubs round the house, will attract more of them: for they like to be in the neighborhood of our habitations, if they furnish cover."

In addition to Jefferson's admiration of the mockingbird, five southern states (Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas and Florida) claim the mockingbird as state bird.

As for the mockingbird itself, it is mostly gray with a long tail. It has bold white wing patches that flash while it is in flight. Mockingbirds often lives in suburban neighborhoods but usually avoid deep forests. They can be aggressive near their nests and will regularly dive-bomb cats, dogs, and even humans who approach to closely.

1. Which of the following would be an unusual observation?

- A. A mockingbird imitating a car horn
- B. A mockingbird singing within a thick forest
- C. A mockingbird singing for hours
- D. A mockingbird singing from an exposed branch

2. Which of the words in the following two sentences means “easily seen”?

The mockingbird is one of the most prolific songsters in the avian world. It can “sing” for hours on end from conspicuous perches on rooftops, telephone wires, or exposed branches.

- A. perches
- B. songsters
- C. prolific
- D. conspicuous

3. According to the author, what makes the mockingbird remarkable?

- A. Its appearance
- B. The fact that it can imitate a car alarm
- C. The incredible range of sounds it can make
- D. The fact that it is common in the southern two-thirds of the United States

4. What “warning” does Thomas Jefferson offer in his quote?

- A. Make sure your children learn about the mockingbird or else they might be haunted
- B. Do not plant cedar trees near a mockingbird’s nest
- C. Planting the wrong kinds of trees can hurt mockingbirds
- D. Harming a mockingbird or its eggs carries consequences

5. Which of the following supports the idea that the mockingbird is a popular bird?

- A. It is the state bird for five different states
- B. It lives in suburban neighborhoods
- C. It was the first pet to live in the White House
- D. Thomas Jefferson considered the mockingbird superior to other birds

6. Which is NOT true about mockingbirds?

- A. They have white wing patches
- B. Mockingbirds have long tails
- C. The mockingbird is the state bird of Arkansas
- D. Mockingbirds avoid places that humans live

7. According to Thomas Jefferson, what are the ways to attract mockingbirds to yards? Circle all that apply

- A. Plant trees and shrubs around the house
- B. Plant cedar trees in the neighborhood
- C. Provide cover
- D. Set up nesting boxes