

Northern Mockingbird in Kenora in 1965

Martin K. McNicholl

THE THOROUGH REVIEW by Roy Smith and Winnie Poon of the changing status of Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) in Toronto and surrounding areas (Smith and Poon 2006) also provides an overview of the current and historical status of mockingbirds in Ontario generally. It stimulated me to draw attention of Ontario birders and ornithologists to a previously published record near Ontario's western boundary in a source generally overlooked by Ontario observers.

On 19 November 1965, a long-billed, largely grey bird with white patches in its darker wings and tail appeared at the Kenora, Ontario, feeder of Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Thorpe. Although they were able to identify all their regular feeder birds, this one was unfamiliar to them. They consulted with my uncle, Jim Howe, who was somewhat more knowledgeable on identification of the commoner birds of the Kenora-Sioux Lookout area of Ontario. The bird was also unfamiliar to him, but it seemed to fit the description and drawing of a Clark's Nutcracker

(*Nucifraga columbiana*) that been described the previous week-end in a Winnipeg bird column after it wandered to a bird feeder in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba (Mossop 1965). The Thorpes contacted Harold V. Hosford, the bird columnist in Winnipeg's other main newspaper of that time to inform him of their mystery bird and their tentative identification. Hosford invited David R. M. Hatch, Northern Great Plains editor of *Audubon Field Notes* at that time [when that region included the prairie provinces], Peter M. Press and me to accompany him to Kenora to try to confirm this identification. On 19 December 1965, we travelled to my Uncle Jim and Aunt Mary Howe's house in Kenora and then continued with them to the Thorpe's where we soon saw the bird and identified it as a Northern Mockingbird (Hosford 1965c). This was presumably the same bird reported at Kenora on 29 December 1965 by Goodwin (1966), but this Kenora record was not included in Speir's (1985) compilation of Ontario records.

Although mockingbirds were far out of their normal range in Kenora in 1965, they were occurring with increasing frequency at that time in the prairie provinces and adjacent U.S. plains states (reviewed by Brazier 1964a, 1964b), and Hosford (1965a) had speculated that one that I saw in Winnipeg's Brookside Cemetery in May that year might become Manitoba's first nesting record. Herbert W. R. Copland also saw one that June in the Alf Hole Goose Sanctuary, near Renne, slightly west of the Ontario/Manitoba border (Hosford 1965b, Taylor 1985). In subsequent years, they have become slightly more frequent in Manitoba, with about five records documented annually (Holland and Taylor 2003), and the first known nesting occurring in Pinawa, another location near the

Ontario/Manitoba border, in 1972 (Taylor 1985, Holland and Taylor 2003).

As many Winnipeg naturalists own or have access to cabins or cottages on lakes in the Great Canadian Shield between the Ontario/Manitoba border and Lake-of-the-Woods, and others undertake canoe trips in or including that region, Ontario researchers reviewing population trends, range changes and precise seasonal ranges of Ontario bird species should be aware that the two newspaper bird columns mentioned above and publications of the Manitoba Naturalists Society (formerly Natural History Society of Manitoba) contain records of birds observed in that area of Ontario (see McNicholl 2003:20-21) that may not have been also published in Ontario periodicals.



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