

## Nesting of Northern Mockingbirds in an Artificial Structure

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On 10 April 1995, I saw a Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) at a martin gourd nailed under the eaves at the peak of a small shed at our home in Richland, Mississippi. The gourd was cut away in front, leaving a saucer-like cup (Figure 1). I had placed it there early in 1993 as a possible nest site for Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) that nest under a nearby bridge. On 17 April the mockingbirds had built a nest in the gourd shortly before we left on an extended trip. My brother-in-law, Robert Diffenderfer, while working part of our garden, watched the gourd nest almost daily. He saw adults feeding young in the nest and saw two young of the brood that fledged a day or two before our return on 12 May. Afterwards we saw adults feeding at least two flying young. The same pair [apparently] renested and fledged a brood of four young from a nearby nest about 20 June.

On 4 April 1996, after I removed the earlier nest from the gourd, I watched mockingbirds build a new nest in the gourd. It was completed on 10 April. We did not disturb the birds during incubation or when they were being fed. On 4 May we could see four young in the nest and all fledged that day. Photographs (Figures 1 and 2) were taken on 4 May.

Four flying and completely feathered young were still being fed by both adults on 30 May. The same pair of adults on the same date had a new nest and a clutch of four eggs in a muscadine (*Vitis*) vine about 40 m from the gourd nest. The gourd nest and vine nest were constructed of similar materials. Twigs bearing lichens formed the basal structure, then soft materials, including the woolly stems of a common weed known as "rabbit tobacco" were added to the base. Both nests were lined with rootlets.

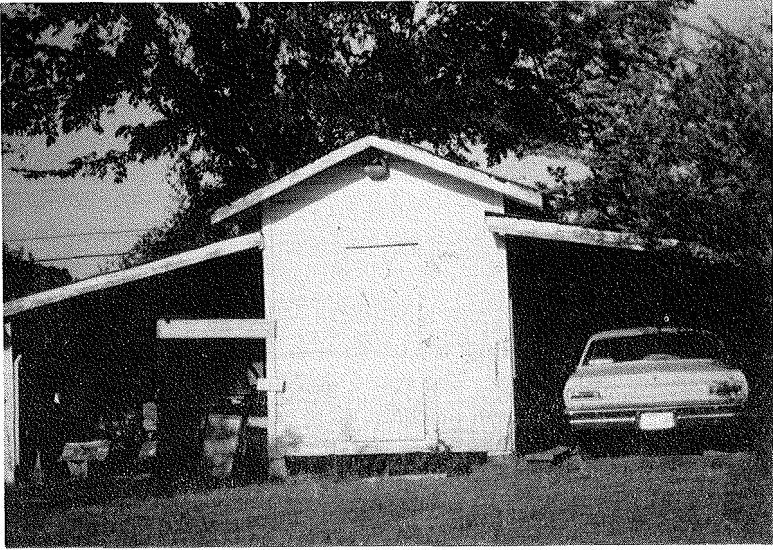


Figure 1. Gourd attached to the peak of the shed where Northern Mockingbirds nested.

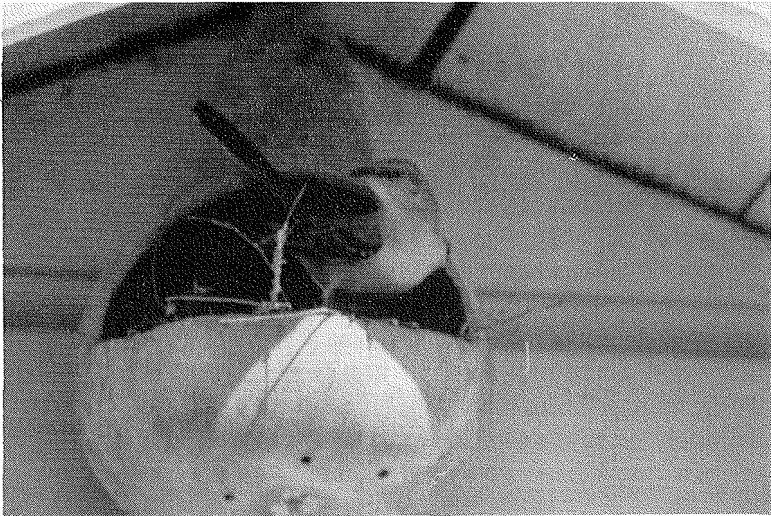


Figure 2. Northern Mockingbird at its nest in a gourd.

I have known of only one other mockingbird nest placed on an artificial structure. It was an old nest that I found placed in the top of a hollowed fence post supporting barbed wire and covered with vines that would have concealed it from view. Alexander Sprunt (1948. Pp. 295-315 *in* A.C. Bent, *Life Histories of North American Nuthatches, Wrens, Thrashers, and Their Allies*. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 195) notes that mockingbirds will rarely nest in a bird house.