

**BEGGING BY A NON-CAPTIVE FLEDGLING NORTHERN
MOCKINGBIRD FROM A CAPTIVE HOUSE SPARROW**

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I maintained a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) cage trap near a Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) nesting gourd rack in a residential yard in Jackson, MS, in order to remove House Sparrows that attempted to usurp the available Purple Martin nest cavities. I kept one House Sparrow in the trap in order to increase the likelihood of trapping others. On the morning of 4 July 2015, I observed a fledgling Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) in the yard being followed by its parents, <10 m from the trap with an adult female House Sparrow inside. Later that evening, I noticed the fledgling Northern Mockingbird was beside the trap while the House Sparrow inside the trap fluttered back and forth as trapped birds typically do. The fledgling could be heard faintly begging from the House Sparrow. Its mouth was open, exposing its yellowish gape. The fledgling oriented itself toward the House Sparrow, and its head followed the House Sparrow as it fluttered back and forth inside the trap. This behavior continued for over three minutes, during which time I videoed a portion of the event (viewable online under *The Mississippi Kite* Supplemental Files at missbird.org). After about 30 seconds of videoing, the fledgling stopped begging. It may have been disturbed by my presence (<2 m away) or the alarm calls its nearby parents were making because of my proximity. I do not know how long the begging behavior occurred before my observation, but I never saw it happen again.

Northern Mockingbird fledglings are fed a diet of mostly invertebrates and some fruit (Farnsworth et al. 2011), and these items were not available inside the trap. At no point during the observation did I see the House Sparrow attempt to feed seed from inside the trap to the fledgling. The House Sparrow did not appear to have anything in its mouth to suggest it might be willing to feed the fledgling. However, the fledgling continued unsuccessfully soliciting food from the trapped House Sparrow for over three minutes, even while its parents were nearby giving alarm calls.

At least one instance of a captive bird feeding a non-captive bird has been reported (Davis 1952), but I am unaware of any involving Northern Mockingbirds. There are at least three published reports of Northern Mockingbird fledglings being fed by other species. These include two separate instances of nestlings being fed even after fledging; one by an Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) pair (Carr and Goin 1965) and another by a Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) (McNair and Duyck 1991, Wayne 1910). The third report is of a female Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) feeding two fledglings (Westwood 1946). I am unaware of reports of unsuccessful soliciting by Northern Mockingbird fledglings from another species.

Many bird species have conspecific nonbreeding helpers which help rear their young during the breeding season (Skutch 1935, 1961); but, excluding brood-parasites, interspecific feeding is less common. Interspecific feeding probably conveys no evolutionary benefit to the caregiver, but is evidently beneficial to the one being fed. Though interspecific feeding is relatively uncommon among non-brood-parasitic birds, the incidence of such behavior is not well known (Drózdź et al. 2004, Farmer et al. 2008, Lozano and Lemon 1998, McGowan 1990, McNair and Duyck 1991, Pierce 2005, Shy 1982, Skutch 1961, Yoerg and O'Halloran

1991). Shy (1982) reviewed instances where interspecific feeding was reported in the literature. She believed it was unlikely that unsuccessful begging attempts would be reported, though she relayed a personal communication from Brewer of a fledgling Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) begging from a female House Sparrow which pecked at the fledgling. Ficken (1967) observed a fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) beg from an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). Brown-headed Cowbirds are brood-parasites, but the American Crow was not the host in this instance and ultimately killed the fledgling. In Australia, a begging brood-parasitic Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) fledgling was alternately (even simultaneously) attacked and fed repeatedly by a Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascinans*) pair that was likely not the host (Kikkawa and Dwyer 1962). Evidently, interspecific begging (excluding begging of a brood-parasite from its host), aside from being peculiarly interesting, can have positive and/or negative consequences for fledglings and warrants documentation even when unsuccessful.

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