

The rails were not punctual, and one could not be sure of seeing them, except that on most late afternoons they were seen working downstream toward the swamp. This swamp covers an area of about thirty-five acres, growing the usual alder-willow-osier somewhat sparsely but with a rank growth of coarse grasses and weeds. A few small trees grow in drier spots, but the more predominant wet areas combine with clay-mud and unstable hummocks to make it a difficult place in which to walk.

Both rails were seen on February 2, and one was seen on the afternoon of February 3. That night the heavy blizzard began, and when we again looked for them on February 5, they could not be found nor were they seen during the much warmer weather that immediately followed. — Aden Gokay, Canaan.

A Mockingbird Congregation in Freeport: The squad of Mockingbirds I observed together in Freeport, Long Island, on November 6, 1960, is apparently unusual in the New York City region during a season other than that of breeding. The observation further underlines Ludlow Griscom's perplexity regarding the status of this southern species in the New York City area. "The Mockingbird," he declared, "is one of our local species which defies classification."

I discovered one Mockingbird in a pine tree after having heard a loud, thick chip note while I was inside my house. I summoned my wife Virginia to the backyard. While watching this one, we were amazed to see another alight in a flutter of white wing and tail patches. After seeing three flitting about in the trees, my discernment had been taxed too much to credit the quartet Virginia was beginning to believe she was seeing. Then three alighted in an oak in front of us. In a nearby tree another was perched. We saw four Mockingbirds at the same time.

They remained awhile that morning. They disappeared for a time but were seen later in the afternoon. I did not study them for plumage differences but did not notice any. I did not have much time to look for them again, but I did see two in a nearby hawthorne tree on November 14. Only one was observed after that and the last recorded date for seeing it is December 5. Actually it was observed for approximately a week later. It has not been seen there since.

It fed on the red berries of a thorny bramble hugging a wooden fence that abuts, at a right angle, a long hedge about seven feet high. Often the bird perched in a small wild cherry tree in that corner. It would be seen flying, headed apparently for the other side of the canal located across the street from my house.

The proximity to the beaches of the bay and the ocean (Freeport is about seven miles from the beginning of Jones Beach) may have had something to do with the Bird's presence. J. P. Giraud, Jr., writing in **Birds of Long Island** in 1844, points out that "at times it frequents the dry sandy beaches in the immediate vicinity of the sea." In recent years single birds (most reports from the New York region are of single birds except for those breeding) have come in great part from such places as Riis Park, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Oak Beach, Jones Beach, Fire Island State Park and Montauk. John J. Elliott reported a Mockingbird visiting a feeding station at Oceanside (four miles from Freeport) since before Christmas through at least, as of this writing, February 25 — a bird that had survived last winter's severe cold and snow.

It certainly seems to be true that many more Mockingbirds have been reported of late. This, of course, may be due in part to an increased number of observers. But in the last four years there has also been a rise in the number of nesting and breeding records. Mr. Elliott, reporting a Mockingbird's nest at Roxbury in Rockaway Beach in 1956, said it was "believed to be the first authentic record for Long Island for many years" (KINGBIRD Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 104). Two Mockingbirds were observed at a nest with two nearly fledged young near Mecox Bay at Watermill in 1956. This was reported by Dennis Puleston and Gilbert S. Raynor (KINGBIRD Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 14). A probable nesting Mockingbird was reported for western Long Island in 1957 (KINGBIRD Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 104). Herbert Johnson, superintendent of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, told me he had a pair breeding there in 1959 and again in 1960.

Emanuel Levine, editor of the **Linnaean News-Letter**, published by the Linnaean Society of New York, in the June, 1960, issue lists the breeding Mockingbirds as part of a northward movement of southern species. However, 117 years ago

Giraud reported that "this unrivaled songster occasionally passes the season of reproduction on Long Island." And Griscom cites a few sporadic breeding records for the New York City region between 1875 and 1884. It would be interesting to determine whether there were any invasions from the south during these periods. It should be said here that Dr. Elon Howard Eaton in the *Birds of New York*, published in 1910, commented that "on Long Island and southeastern New York this bird has been reported on numerous occasions and there seems to be some evidence that it has bred near Rockaway, Long Island and possibly other portions of southeastern New York, but no definite evidence to this effect has been brought forward."

These 'occasional' reports of Mockingbirds have been — and still are — frequent enough to always elicit considerable interest. Theodore Roosevelt noted a Mockingbird shot at Oyster Bay, August 15, 1876. Around the turn of the century, the belief was prevalent that the reported Mockingbirds were escaped cage birds.

Allan D. Cruickshank in *Birds Around New York City*, published by the American Museum of Natural History in 1942, quotes Griscom extensively on the subject (the source for the Griscom quotes in this piece). Then Cruickshank asserts that the analysis of the records "indicates that the bird is rarest in June and July and occurs most frequently in autumn between September 30 and November 30." Griscom points out that "no other southern species occurs chiefly in fall and winter" as the Mockingbird does in the New York City area. What is their origin? Where did the four birds come from that popped up in my yard? Cruickshank, or a writer today, could not do better than quote Ludlow Griscom: "where the birds recorded locally can come from is a mystery which still awaits solution." — Maxwell C. Wheat, Jr., 333 Bedell Street, Freeport, Long Island.

Hook, Line and — Wings: Early July, 1960 featured warm, clear, windless, full-moon nights, as well as the state opening of bass-fishing season. Two of us, W. T. Cook of Schenectady and I, were as usual opening our season with some surface-action plugs, casting into a shallow bay of Jenny Lake, Saratoga County. I was using a black Jitterbug which, for the uninitiated, is a floating lure with a bright metal "paddle" on the front to give it a wobbling action and noise, and leaving a trail of bubbles. It weighs 5/8 ounce, is nearly three inches long, and has two treble-hooks. My companion was using a quiet, light-colored surface lure. We were casting alternately into the same general area, with about 100-foot throws ahead of the boat.

It was midnight, but the moonlight was more than enough to make flashlights unneeded. We could see far along the shore without difficulty and well enough to fix our lures. The water was without ripples except for our lures and oars — even to absence of semi-usual tail-slapping beavers and jumping fish. In general we were casting slightly to the right of the moon's reflection, making easy for us to follow the action of our lures.

The bay, and that half of the lake, is heavily wooded right to the shore, and undeveloped. Barred Owls have nested there for years and have added interest to night-fishing trips during a week or so of the high-pitched, insect-like hisses of the young birds, out of the nest but not yet entirely on their own. This penetrating hiss, incidentally, seems too high-pitched to be heard by some people.

We heard action up in the trees ahead of us, in the direction in which we were casting. It was as though a bird had landed heavily on a leafy branch. Then things were quiet.

I cast, waited a couple of seconds, and started to retrieve. Again the noise in the trees and then, over my lure a hundred feet head of us and 50 feet out from shore, a bird dropped vertically with slowly flapping, big wings. Its feet touched the water. Then it flew back to the trees from where it had appeared. There was no slack in the line, and the lure was now a dozen feet or so to the left. Mr. Cook cast his quiet lure — no action.

I cast again. The bird came in on a swoop, reached down for the plug, and continued its swoop upwards. I left the reel with no drag, and again the bird dropped the lure. It had carried the floater about 50 feet. Then another no-action cast of the quiet lure.