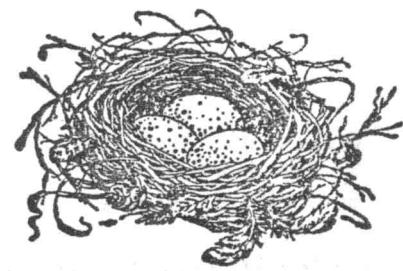


BROCKWAY LOOKOUT

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First Northern Mockingbird Nesting Record for the Keweenaw Peninsula by Laurence C. Binford

The status of the Northern Mockingbird on the Keweenaw Peninsula is somewhat of an enigma. It was first recorded at Chassell, Houghton Co., on 3 May 1962 (John Weber; Jack-Pine Warbler 41:34). Since then its spring abundance has slowly increased, with at least 43 additional sightings, including all years from 1992 to 2005; 5 occurred in Baraga Co., 20 in Houghton Co., and 18 in Keweenaw Co. (Binford, manuscript in progress). Binford considered it an occasional (annually irregular), perhaps very rare (annually regular), spring vagrant overshoot from the south and predicted its eventual breeding, because its pattern of invasion was similar to that of the Northern Cardinal and House Finch.

However, this species is not known to breed north of Lake Superior, and most spring mockingbirds seemed to disappear from the Keweenaw. Prior to 2005, there were only five records for summer (12 June-27 July), three for fall (16 October-17 November), and one for early winter (1-14 December; Bell 2004). The 27 July 1988 sighting at Freda, Houghton Co. (Weaver 2000) involved two birds together, but no breeding evidence was found. The Northern Mockingbird breeds widely but sparingly in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan and is expanding northward, but there seems to be only one confirmed breeding record for the entire Upper Peninsula, a nest in the summer of 1984 near Harvey, Marquette Co. (Illicky 1984; Dziepak 1991; McPeck and Adams 1994). Thus, although not unexpected, the following episode caused great excitement among birders and marked a pivotal point in the mockingbird's Keweenaw status and its range expansion in the state.

In early summer 2005, a pair of mockingbirds set up residence at the home of Michael and Mary Beiring along Paradise Road about 1 mile west of Chassell, Houghton Co. (T54 N, R33W, Sec. 31). Alerted by the Beirings, Joe Youngman and Lynn Murphy saw two adults harassing a cat on 23 July. The next day Mike Beiring found and photographed a tiny mockingbird on the ground. Judging from its young age, it must have fallen out of the nest (photo in Binford files). It was left alone and soon disappeared, presumably killed, as it could not fly. On 6 August Russ Hanson and Joe Kaplan found one adult feeding a fledgling (photo of young by Kaplan).

Jake Musser and I visited the yard on 8 August. In an hour of observation, we saw only one adult, probably the female, as it never sang; the male likely lost a battle with the cat, although we also saw another possible predator, an American Kestrel. We watched as the adult fed two large fledglings perched together high in a tall spruce; each had a tail about three-quarters grown, gray spots on the throat and breast, and large yellow ricti (swollen, fleshy mouth corners), this age indicating that the young had not dispersed far from the nest. At one point, a Blue Jay closely approached the young, causing them to fly awkwardly some 15 feet to another spruce. The adult, returning with food, seemed to have trouble finding her progeny (!), but did so when they returned to near their original perch. That a grape arbor was nearby in the neighbor's yard might not be coincidental, because the mockingbird is well known to covet grapes and in fact attains its greatest Michigan abundance in Van Buren Co., the "grape capital" of the state (Dziepak 1991).

Thus, the undiscovered nest originally contained at least three young, one of which fell out and two of which survived to near adult size (this species is said to lay 3-5, rarely 6, eggs). This is the first confirmed breeding for the Keweenaw Peninsula (Binford ms.), apparently the second for the U.P., and the northernmost for Michigan. Among passerine birds, colonization of new territory is rarely thoroughly documented. Observers are urged to *immediately* report all sightings of the Northern Mockingbird, so that its status in the Keweenaw, especially in summer, can be monitored (see bird alert phone numbers in this issue).

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Newsletter Note! Inside the back page is the **Calendar of Events!** Events are open to everyone. Submit materials and notes for the next newsletter to **Dana Richter, drichter@mtu.edu** or **906-487-2149**.

SOME NOTABLE COPPER COUNTRY BIRDS: Spring/Summer 2005

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. 30 Mar. Larsen Road, Atlantic Mine, in with a flock of Red Polls, Barb and Phil Quenzi.
Northern Mockingbird. 11 Apr. Agate Beach Road near Misery Bay, nice pictures, Mike Shupe.
Spruce Grouse. 14 Apr. Baraga Plains south of L'Anse, male in jack pine tree, David Flaspohler.
Thayer's Gull. 30 Apr. Big Traverse Bay among Herring Gulls on beach, . Joe Kaplan, Russ Hansen, Keren Tischler.
White Crowned Sparrows and Lincoln's Sparrow. 9 May. Three in yard south of Chassell, Lynn Murphy.
Painted Bunting. 9 May. Agate Beach Road near Misery Bay, bright male, at feeder with finches, nice pictures, Dana Nakkula.
Peregrine Falcon. 9 May. Hunting ducks over the Chassell Holding ponds, Russ Hanson and Joe Kaplan.
Wilson's Phalarope (female) and Dowitcher. 9 May. Atlantic Mine holding ponds among other shorebirds, Joe Kaplan.
Stilt Sandpiper. 10 May. Two in breeding plumage, among other shorebirds, Atlantic Mine holding ponds, Joe Kaplan.
Piping Plover. 13 May. Standing in a sand bar at the head of the Keweenaw Bay just south of Baraga, Lynn Murphy.
White Pelicans. 16 May. Three birds standing on rocks in Eagle Harbor, Lynn Murphy.
Bullock's Oriole. 17 May. Immature male feeding on oranges in yard, Hancock, Keren Tischler and Joe Kaplan.
Northern Mockingbird. 17 May. About 9", nice white patch on lower center wing, Sedar Bay, Joy Ziemnick.
Solitary Sandpiper. 19 May. On an old log by a beaver pond, near Sedar Bay, Joy Ziemnick.
Hudsonian Godwit. 20 May. Two birds on the stamp sands, Peepsock Trails south of Houghton, Joe Kaplan.
Black-backed Woodpecker and Gray-cheeked Thrush. 23 May. Bear Lake Trail across from McLain State Park, Joe Kaplan.
White Pelicans. 23 May. 13 birds, Pequaming Bay, north of L'Anse. Tom Gribble and Elaine Dougavito.
Northern Cardinals. All summer, pair, suspected nesting, 5th Ave. east Houghton, Christa Walck.
Great Egret. 25 Jul. Flying over, intersection of Trap Rock Valley Rd. and Wood Bush Rd. David Flaspohler.
Smith's Longspur. 1 Sep. Bird feeding on the ground, Arnheim Sloughs south of Chassell. Joe Kaplan, Russ Hansen, Keren Tischler.
Harris Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow. 30 Sep. Salo Rd. Hancock, with White-throated sparrows at feeder, Dana Richter.



✓ KIRTLAND'S WARBLER NEST ON THE BARAGA PLAINS

As early as 1986, there was a confirmed singing male Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) in the Upper Peninsula in Marquette county. There have been a few observations of singing male Kirtland's Warblers on the Baraga Plains over the last few years, and in at least one instance it was believed that a pair was present. This July it was my good fortune to confirm that a pair of Kirtland's did breed successfully on the plains. I had heard that the official Kirtland's press release mentioned two singing males had been recorded on the plains this year. When I mentioned that to Laurie Binford he assigned me the task of "confirming" the breeding record. With some initial grumbling I accepted the assignment, while thinking "Is it me who is retired or is it Laurie?"

Anyhow, I was able to locate one singing male Kirtland's in mid-July and with considerable follow-up effort I confirmed that he had a mate. Eventually, on the 28th of July, I saw the male Kirtland's feeding a fledgling. A couple of days later I witnessed and photographed the female Kirtland's feeding a fledgling as well. After the sighting of the fledgling on the 28th I was still uncertain whether the pair was successful. Why? Because the Brown-headed Cowbird is a well known parasite of Kirtland's Warblers, and I could not be sure that the very young fledgling I saw was indeed a Kirtland's and not a Cowbird. But the fledgling I saw on the 2nd of August was starting to bob its tail the way Kirtland's do and it was still a smaller bird than the female Kirtland's that was feeding it. So then I was certain it was a Kirtland's Warbler fledgling.

The fledging date in the very end of July seems quite late. Most warblers, including Kirtland's should have fledged their young something like a month earlier, so it may well be that this pair made a previous nesting attempt that failed and I was lucky enough to locate them on their second try. But now we know for sure, one of the rarest of birds in Michigan has nested in our neighborhood. -- Joseph Youngman

2 worked w/me in 2000/2001

Blue Jays Eating Paint Chips and Wood Ashes! What For?

One spring morning I observed a group of about eight Blue Jays in a commotion in front of a small shed door in the yard not far from the house on our place in the country. They appeared to be eating something. With the binoculars I could see they were eating paint chips that had peeled off the door. Some of the birds would even fly at the door and pull off peeling paint chips, and then they would scramble for the pieces when they fell to the ground. I observed this behavior on several mornings. The paint was brown latex that had been applied ten or more years ago.

It is possible that the Blue Jays were satisfying some sort of need for minerals, similar to the way deer eat salt or squirrels gnaw on old bones. I have also observed Blue Jays scratching and apparently eating wood ashes where a brush pile had been burned. It is also possible that the birds were using the pieces of paint and ashes as grit, as many birds require small stones to aid their gizzard in grinding food. For whatever reason, I hope that the paint chips were not harmful to them. -- Dana Richter