

THE FIRST RECORD OF TROPICAL MOCKINGBIRD (*MIMUS GILVUS*) IN
NEVIS, WEST INDIES

MARK MICHAEL LUDLOW^{1,2}

¹PhD Candidate, Ornitho-Archaeology, University of Wales, Lampeter, United Kingdom; e-mail MMLBird@aol.com; ²Current Addresses: 501 Slaters Lane #1022, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, USA: & Blue Roofed House (Blue Monkey), Oualie Lane South, Oualie Bay, Nevis, West Indies

Abstract. --- I observed a single Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) actively engaged in territorial vocalizations and territorial defense, at the highest reaches of the road known as Oualie Lane South (elevation circa 100 ft above sea level), on the leeward side, north northwestern quadrant on the island of Nevis, Oualie Bay, St. James Parish, Nevis, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis, West Indies.

Key Words. --- Caribbean, *Mimus gilvus*, Nevis, Tropical Mockingbird.

TROPICAL MOCKINGBIRD (*MIMUS GILVUS*)

Ten (10) subspecies of Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) are recognized by Clements (2000) and ten (10) subspecies of Tropical Mockingbird are recognized by Dickinson (2003).

Within its insular Caribbean range it is:

A fairly common year-round resident on Guiana Island off the northeastern coast of Antigua, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, the Grenadines, Grenada and San Andres (Raffaele *et al* 1998: 382).

The AOU Checklist (1983: 517) indicates that (possible human/anthropogenic) introductions of this species on both Barbados and Nevis had failed. Danforth (1936: 4) states: 'Introduced on Nevis many years ago, but now extirpated'.

WHAT IS ITS CURRENT RANGE?

Hinder (1989), Bond (1993, 5th Ed.), Raffaele *et al* (1998), AOU (1998), Hunt *et al* (2001), Dickinson (2003), Clements (2003), Raffaele *et al* (2003), and Clements *et al* (2010), **do not** include the island of Nevis or the island of St. Kitts within the known range of the Tropical Mockingbird. It is tangentially notable that Steadman *et al* (1997) also **do not** include Tropical Mockingbird within their report entitled *The Birds of St. Kitts, Lesser Antilles*.

BirdLife International (2011), includes the two undifferentiated islands of St. Kitts and Nevis within the Country/Territory distribution of the Tropical Mockingbird and lists it as an 'occurrence status - native' (definition

of native – ‘is or was native to the area’) but neither breeding, nor non-breeding, nor passage, which may be confusing, misleading, and inaccurate. (The implication may be that the author of that specific Fact Sheet presumes that Tropical Mockingbird may at some time in the distant or evolutionary past have possibly been present in the area). Additionally, the lumping of two geographically separate islands such as St. Kitts and Nevis, as done by BirdLife International (2011), is an imprecise and unscientific practice that does not communicate important information with useful clarity. In addition, certain widely distributed common literature, to include Gordon (2005: 55), who has also referred to an unspecified ‘mocking bird (*sp*)’ as ‘sometimes heard near citrus orchards’ on Nevis, is problematic but may be attributable to insufficient field identification skills and a lack of ornithological expertise.

Johnson (2010) includes Tropical Mockingbird within his checklist of the birds of Nevis. The inclusion of Tropical Mockingbird by the late Jim Johnson in his publically available *A Check List of the Birds of Nevis* (2010) is an indication that the species may have been previously noted outside of the ranges in the citations of the species ranges previously noted above. Jim Johnson was a highly regarded local biologist and naturalist and the inclusion of Tropical Mockingbird on that list can be based upon his accurate confirmation that the species has previously been noted by him on the island of Nevis or that Johnson felt it was reasonably probable that Tropical Mockingbird would be eventually documented on Nevis, in part, due to the species presence on two islands (Antigua and Guadeloupe) within close proximity (inter-visible) to Nevis. Jim Johnson is no longer available to confirm this author’s assumption (his records were destroyed in the fire that caused his death) and the author’s assumption is based upon the expertise and reputation of Jim Johnson. Hence this report may not be a first record of the species in Nevis, but rather the first published and publically available report of Tropical Mockingbird on Nevis (not through anthropogenic introduction, i.e., naturally occurring) and is a confirmation of the presence and behaviors of that single Tropical Mockingbird.

From the apparent differences between Johnson (2010) and Hinder (1989), Bond (1993, 5th Edition), Raffaele *et al* (1998), Hunt *et al* (2001), Dickinson (2003), Clements (2003), Raffaele *et al* (2003), and Clements *et al* (2010), it is important to confirm the presence of the species on the island of Nevis and to confirm what appeared to be seasonally appropriate breeding or attempted breeding behaviors by a single member of that species.

The presence of this species on the island of Nevis may be a representation of range expansion by the species; however, additional data and breeding confirmations are needed to confirm the hypothesis of range expansion of this species into the island of Nevis. Indeed, this species may have become somewhat commonly found (of an indeterminate extent, if at all) around residential gardens, as noted in some common literature, but that state of knowledge, if it exists, has not been sufficiently disseminated to become part of the scientific ornithological literature.

The subspecies of the bird remains unknown. The single bird was neither captured nor observed with sufficient detail to suggest from which subspecies it might belong, though *Mimus gilvus antillarum* is the geographically closest *Mimus gilvus* subspecies present in certain islands of the southern Lesser Antilles as noted by Clements (2003), Clements *et al* (2010), and Dickinson (2003).



Fig. 1. Photographic image of a Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) provided for reference purposes – not the specific bird reported herein. Photograph by: Matt Victoria.

NEVIS

Nevis is a compact oceanic island of volcanic origin with an area of circa 93 km², situated in the northern Lesser Antilles. Politically it is a portion of the two island country, The Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis, commonly referred to as St. Kitts and Nevis. The island of Nevis rises gradually from the shore to a central peak of circa 985 meters (c. 3232 ft) and exhibits a range of natural and secondary habitats which include: elfin woodland; montane forest, palm brake, grassland, coastal shrub, dry woodland, and farmland (Robinson and Lowery 2000). The island of Nevis is in a long and often arrested process of biological succession and recovery from the almost total denudation of all native plant and associated animal species up to the steeper circa 1000 foot elevations of the island. The anthropogenic caused denudation was for the purposes of the colonial agra-industry; the primary forms being plantation sugarcane (Genus *Saccharum*) and plantation cotton (Genus *Gossypium*) production.

THE RECORDED SIGHTING

On 8 August 2010, and repeatedly thereafter for approximately five (5) days, a single Tropical Mockingbird was observed c. 50 feet from this author's personal hillside residence, at an elevation of circa 135 feet above sea level (17°11'56.77" N, 62°36'32.16" W). The approximate five day period of occasional observation was artificial due to the observer's departure from the island at the end of that period. The bird was observed and heard calling from higher branches of the small hillside trees in the dry woodland environment. The bird was also observed actively and aggressively chasing all other bird species from an approximate 50 foot radius of two overlapping areas encompassing two preferred calling locations.

Photographs were not taken because the significance of this event was not immediately apparent. No action was taken to determine the age, sex, or other physiological conditions of the individual.

Addendum dated 31 December 2011: This sighting was acknowledged in *North American Birds* 2011: Vol. 65, No. 2: 359.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The prior ongoing efforts of the late James (Jim) W. Johnson to document the various bird species of Nevis, and to enthusiastically share that knowledge, has established a foundation and a standard upon which this and subsequent ornithological reports can be based: His loss is a great loss to the people and the island of Nevis and to those whose objectives are to accurately document the avifauna of the island for both scientific and ecotourism purposes.

LITERATURE CITED

- AOU. 1998 Checklist of North American birds: The species of North America from the Arctic through Panama, including the West Indies and Hawaiian Islands. 7th Edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- BirdLife International. 2011. Species factsheet: *Mimus gilvus*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> (13/02/2011).
- Bond, J. 1993 impression. Birds of the West Indies. 5th Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, New York.
- Clements, J.F. (Editor). 2000. Birds of the World: A checklist. Ibis Publishing Company, Vista, California.
- Clements, J.F., T.S. Schulenberg, M.J. Liff, B.L. Sullivan, and C.L. Wood. 2010. The Clements checklist of birds of the World 6.5. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/Clements%206.5.xis/view> (14/02/2011).
- Danforth S.T. 1936. The Birds of St. Kitts and Nevis. (Reprinted from Tropical Agriculture, Vol. XIII, No. 8, pp.213-217). Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: Government Printing Office.
- Dickinson, E.C. (Editor). 2003. The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the World (3rd Edition). Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Gordon, J. 2005 (5th Edition). Nevis: Queen of the Caribees. Macmillan Education, Oxford, England.
- Hilder, P. 1989. The Birds of Nevis. The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, Charlestown, Nevis, West Indies.
- Hunt, J.S., E. Bermingham, and R.E. Ricklefs. 2001. Molecular systematics and biogeography of Antillean Thrashers, Tremblers, and Mockingbirds (Aves: Mimidae). *The Auk* 118: 35-55.
- Johnson, J.W. 2010. A check list of Nevis birds. Downloaded from <http://www.bio-diversity-nevis.org> (14/02/2011).
- Ludlow, M.M. 2007. First record of Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) in Nevis, West Indies. Occasional Paper No. 1 – The Nevis Ornithological Society (The NOS), March 2007, The Nevis Ornithological Society, Nevis, West Indies.
- Ludlow, M.M. 2010. First record of Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) in Nevis, West Indies. Occasional Paper No. 2 – The Nevis Ornithological Society (The NOS), February 2010, The Nevis Ornithological Society, Nevis, West Indies.
- Raffaele, H., J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith, J. Raffaele. 1998. A guide to the birds of the West Indies. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Raffaele, H., J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith, J. Raffaele. 2003. Birds of the West Indies. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

Robinson, D., and J. Lowery 2000. The natural history of the island of Nevis. The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, Charlestown, Nevis, West Indies.

Steadman, D.W., R.L. Norton, M.R. Browning, and W.J. Arendt. 1997. The birds of St. Kitts, Lesser Antilles. *Caribbean Journal of Science* 33: 1-20.