

# Breeding the Common Mocking Bird

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**T**he Common Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottus* is a well-known bird almost everyone knows has a high reputation as a singer. For this reason it was also a much-sought-for bird in European collections and in earlier days they were kept, mostly as singles, in quite a number of aviaries. Because it's now-a-days difficult to obtain North American birds on the European market, the number of Mockingbirds kept at the moment in Europe is very, very small and breeding results are even rarer.

A Belgian aviculturist, Mr. Peeters, had seen two male Mockingbirds at the home of a friend. Because he (Mr. Peeters) likes good singing birds he decided also to try to obtain a male of this species.

As mentioned, Mockingbirds are very rare over here in Europe and it took Mr. Peeters several years to find a single specimen which was for sale but it was a female. Even so, he obtained it and asked his friend if he could have one of the two males on breeding-loan. This was not a problem and so Mr. Peeters finally had at least a pair of Mockingbirds.

Because this species can be quite aggressive, the birds were first placed side by side in two separated cages and nothing happened. This however, was possibly caused by the bad condition of the male. Later, the female was placed in a 3.5 meter x 3.5 meter [approximately 12 x 12 foot] indoor aviary and the male was placed – in his cage – into this aviary also. He was still in a bad condition and so he was exchanged for the other male Mr. Peeters' friend still had.

This second male was in very good condition and was singing much of the time. After about a week in the smaller cage, its door was opened and the pair shared the same enclosure although they were seldom seen together.

Even so, the male almost directly started to fly around with nesting material in his beak and he started to build a nest of small twigs and grass.

Stimulated by his behavior, the female began to help him although this happened only rarely.

Two days after the birds were placed together, a mating was observed and a day later a second one. After mating, both birds went again their own ways. Six days after the birds were placed together, the female was sitting on the nest and after a careful inspection, one egg was discovered. The female, however, was disturbed so much that she refused to go back to incubate again and the egg was taken and placed in the nest of a free-living Dunnock *Prunella modularis* [Hedge Sparrow] which was nesting in the garden. Unfortunately this nest, including the Mockingbird egg, was later destroyed by jays or magpies.

About two weeks later, the female was calmed down enough to undertake a second nesting-attempt. Of course no inspections were made this time. Twelve days after the female had started incubating, some eggshells were found and from that moment on the amount of living food which was offered was increased rapidly.

With the three chicks in the nest, the male already started to build another nest and shortly after the young had left the nest – at an age of 12 days – the female started another clutch. This time four eggs were laid and with the female incubating, the male had to take care of the three fledged young – a job which he did very well.

From this new clutch, two eggs proved to be infertile but the other two hatched and were raised successfully – again with lots of living food.

Although the Mockingbird is not a very colorful bird, its singing qualities make it a very interesting avicultural subject in Europe and I hope more people which are keeping single birds will start to cooperate to try to breed, and in this way save, the Mockingbird for the European avicultural world.

[Editor's Note: In the United States it is not legal to hold or keep native birds without permits.]

