

HUMAN FACIAL RECOGNITION BY NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRDS (*MIMUS POLYGLOTTOS*).

A number of studies have examined the ability of various animal species to recognize individual humans, but only a few have focused on native, non-captive birds. Previous research demonstrated that American Crows learn to recognize individual human faces. Other research indicated that Northern Mockingbirds learn to discriminate among individual humans, but did not examine the factors involved in the discrimination. We have begun a study of Northern Mockingbirds on the University of North Georgia campus in Dahlonega, GA, to test the hypothesis that Northern Mockingbirds learn to distinguish among individual humans based on facial recognition. Our field tests involve approaching and touching mockingbird nests on successive days and recording the responses of parent birds. We use masks of human faces which we interchange among researchers to determine if birds key on faces as a discriminating factor. We will also explore the possibility that birds may respond differently depending on proximity of nest sites to human pedestrian activity. Here we report on one preliminary field season; we plan to continue the project during future breeding seasons. Our research has received funding from the UNG Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities and from the UNG Department of Biology.