

## Learn Something Small about Why Mockingbirds Sing at Night (in New York City)!

Listen at [www.JacquelineRaposo.com/podcasts/learn-something-small](http://www.JacquelineRaposo.com/podcasts/learn-something-small)

### Audio Story Transcript:

**Sound:** A classic strings rendition of Brahms's *Lullaby*.

### Jacqueline Raposo:

I suggest you listen to this small story at nighttime. Go for a walk when the streets are empty or lay in bed with the lights off. But listen while all is quiet around you.

**Sound:** The music shifts into subdued city street noises — car traffic, birdsong, etc.

### Jacqueline:

Hi, friends, it's Jacqueline. It is late at night in New York City, but I had to rush immediately to my desk after getting inside from walking Mitra because I just had the most beautiful urban nature experience that I might have ever had in my almost-18 years as a New Yorker. I stepped out of the front door at around 11 o'clock at night and I heard this....

**Sound:** Sharp, measured notes from a mockingbird, and then brighter chirps.

### Jacqueline:

It's a mockingbird — a male mockingbird, I'm 98 percent sure — and at first, I thought maybe it was a car alarm or somebody's music. But I very quickly figured out that it was a bird robustly singing at 11 o'clock at night, which, despite my ears being pretty attuned to listening to the birdsong in my very north Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights, I don't think I've ever heard this at night.

**Sound:** A new bright, sharp mockingbird tune...

### Jacqueline:

So, I invite you to Learn Something Small about this magical little bird that filled me with so much joy tonight — possibly the most joy I've felt in this last quite wretched year that we've had.

**Sound:** Street sounds shift to light, plucky piano and string music that underscores the following.

**Jacqueline:**

I stood outside for well over twenty minutes listening to this bird. I found it pretty quickly hidden in a bush-like tree, and I recorded it in a few sessions on my phone. And I was just flabbergasted by the musculature of this little bird, and the pitch and the range of it. My heart busted open by how bombastically this tiny little creature can blast this music out into the night sky, well over the motorcycles that ripped through the taxis, in the cars ripping up from the highway.

I just marveled at this little creature.

Mockingbirds are slender little songbirds. They're about ten inches in length in total with elongated tails and I think slightly elongated beaks as well. They have white underbellies and gray or slightly brown backs. Their wings can have black and dark gray stripes to them and slightly white wingtips, but they can also be a little brownish as well. Their tails get very expressive when they sing, as do their beaks and heads — they open up and let it rip in the same way that robins do.

An interesting thing about all songbirds - especially in urban areas - is that they have to compete with the ambient noise around them. Traffic from motorcycles and trucks and cars resonates at a lower pitch than songbirds' songs do. But despite that, researchers have found (in the last decade) birds in urban areas have changed their songs to even pitch higher or at a louder volume, or have shifted to singing at night or earlier during the day so they don't have to compete. And they're singing to attract mates or to protect their territory. So, chances are the mockingbird that I was hearing tonight — because of how long he was singing for — he was probably a single guy calling for a mate over and over.

The interesting thing about mockingbirds is that they don't have their own song — they are reflecting the sounds around them, which is why in New York City, so many of them sounds like car alarms. And they change what they're singing every three to six rounds or so.

So that's just a little bit about the delightful bird that so rocked my world tonight.

Now, please enjoy this very, very special creature, recorded in Washington Heights, New York City, at 11 o'clock at night on Tuesday, April 6th, 2021.

**Sound:** Music shifts into several minutes of the mockingbird singing various songs with occasional loud motor sounds, dogs barking, etc. Eventually, it shifts back into low city street sounds and Brahms's *Lullaby* returns through to the end.

**Jacqueline:**

The Mockingbird was still singing when I fell asleep, finally, at around 3:00 a.m.. And when I woke up again at eight, it was singing still... A little farther off somewhere and not as consistently and not as robustly, and it was harder to hear him through the rising cloud of dust noise and car traffic and people talking on the street.

But what a determined little bird, huh?

I've lived in New York City for almost 18 years now and this Audubon Park historic district of Washington Heights for 10 and I'm moving out this Saturday. I technically moved out last January and only returned because of how weird Covid has made spaces. But I'm moving out for good this time.

I love this neighborhood and I love this city. So last night's Mockingbird felt like a bit of a goodbye gift for me. And this story is my little goodbye gift back.

You can learn more about Mockingbirds and find links to other audio stories about birds at this page at [JacquelineRaposo.com](http://JacquelineRaposo.com).

Thank you for listening.

And thank you, New York City.

**Sound:** Lullaby continues through to the end and fades out.