

The Brown Thrasher is an uncommon and declining breeder in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

The Brown Thrasher is regarded as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New York. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a drastic decline in the state in the past four decades. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data show a decline in distribution. It is important to note, however, that both BBS surveys and atlas efforts were conducted after this species' most obvious singing period during April shortly after its arrival and prior to nesting. Partners in Flight regard it as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 13, 28, and 30.



Identification

This large relative of the mockingbird is 11-12" long, half of which is tail. Its plumage is bright reddish brown above and buffy below with heavy brown streaking. It has yellow eyes and a slightly downcurved beak. Males and females look alike. Its song is a series of melodious phrases repeated in pairs, which mimic many other species.

Habitat

The Brown Thrasher breeds in shrubby fields, thickets, forest clearings, woodland edges, hedgerows, power line rights-of-way, and pitch-pine/scrub-oak barrens, such as the Albany Pine Bush.

Food

This bird feeds on insects, primarily beetles, and other invertebrates, small fruits and nuts, especially acorns, as well as small reptiles and amphibians. It forages on the ground in dry leaf litter below shrubs and trees by using its bill to scatter leaves and other debris.

Nesting

The nest is built by both sexes and is a cup built of sticks, twigs, dead leaves, and other plant materials and is lined with rootlets. It is well hidden in a dense tangle on the ground under a shrub or bush or above the ground in a shrub or small tree.

Threats

- Loss of early successional habitat from suburban development.
- Reforestation of old fields and shrublands.
- Destruction of regenerating habitat due to more frequent mowing.
- Application of herbicides and pesticides that diminish availability of insect and plant food sources such as fruit-bearing shrubs and trees as well as thorny shrubs for nesting habitat.
- Predation by feral cats, chipmunks, racoons, skunks, and Brown-headed Cowbirds.
- Parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

Management Recommendations

- Plant or maintain a wide variety of trees and shrubs to provide a reliable supply of food. Include berry-producing trees, shrubs and vines, such as dogwood, viburnum, hawthorn, crabapple, blueberry, raspberry, sumac, and grape.
- Create mini clear cuts of 1 to 2 acres to open areas for ground foraging. Young stands (0-5 years) of trees can provide shrubby areas appropriate for insect production and nesting.
- Create transition areas from trees to shrubs and briars to grassy openings to increase nesting and foraging areas.
- Avoid large applications of pesticides to provide adequate insect food.
- Reduce potential predators such as feral cats.

This management summary is adapted from Cade 1986, Cavitt and Haas 2000 and NatureServe 2009.

For additional information, see the following references:

Askins, R. A. 1993. Population trends in grassland, shrubland, and forest birds in eastern North America. *Current Ornithology* 11:1–34.

Cade, B. S. 1986. Habitat Suitability Index Models: Brown Thrasher. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Biological Report 82 (10.118). <http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/wdb/pub/hsi/hsi-118.pdf>

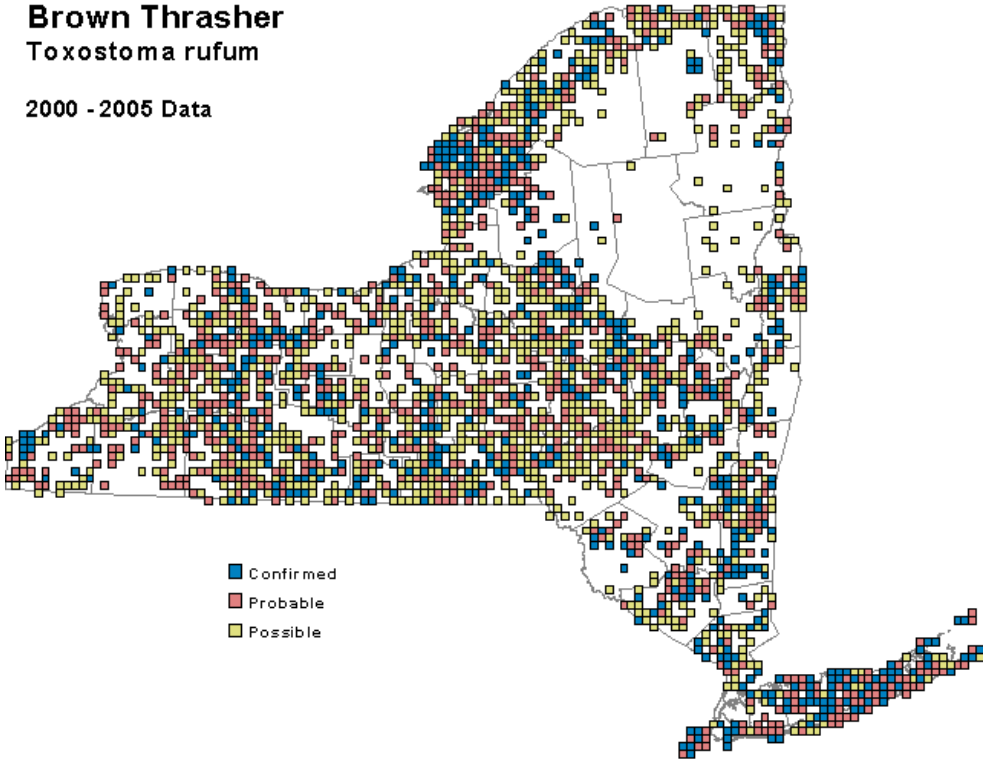
Cavitt, John F., and Carola A. Haas. 2000. Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/557> doi:bna.557

NatureServe. 2009. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: May 14, 2009).

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

2000 - 2005 Data



Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

1980 - 1985 Data

