



How to Help

Brown Thrashers

A long-tailed songbird of brushy habitats in the Eastern United States. Brown Thrashers have declined in areas where brushy woodland and edge habitats are removed and may also disappear from areas that are heavily browsed by deer. Birds can be helped by planting brushy areas for foraging and native berry plants for food.

What Brown Thrashers Need

Food: Brown Thrashers scratch through leaf litter and the very top layer of soil to uncover insects and seeds. The insects they are adapted to hunting are those that thrive in the cool, moist conditions under leaf litter. They also eat fruits and nuts in trees and shrubs, which make up 20-50 percent of their diet. They prefer areas with thick bushes less than 3 feet tall, sparse tree cover, and ground covered with leaf litter. May defend winter territories and food sources.

Nesting: Nests are typically located low in dense shrubs, especially those bearing thorns. Frequently used shrubs include gooseberries, sumac entangled with native honeysuckle, rose bushes, osage orange, eastern red cedar, American plum, rough-leaved dogwood, small elms, honey locust, and in aromatic sumac. They defend a breeding territory which may extend 1-3 acres.

Shelter: Roosting and sleeping behavior is almost unknown, but thrashers presumably roost and sleep within dense bushes. During the day, they spend up to half their time loafing on the ground or in low bushes or trees.

Other: Since thrashers spend most of their time on the ground or in low bushes, they are susceptible to predation by house cats. Thrashers can also be attracted to backyard bathing opportunities.

How You Can Help

- Since Brown Thrashers get many of their insects from beneath leaf litter, provide a feeding area with chokecherries, dogwood, plum, or similarly dense undergrowth where fallen leaves are allowed to remain.
- Plant patches of native berry bushes and trees, including blueberries, huckleberries, holly, sumac, currants, grapes, and cherries.
- Avoid pesticides that might kill their insect food or contaminate fruit and nuts.
- Create as many patches of native bushes and shrubs as possible within yard landscapes.
- Control deer populations and protect woodland understory from over-browsing.
- Despite vigorous defense of their nests, Brown Thrashers are especially likely to abandon nests or lose eggs or chicks to predation if people spend time in the vicinity of nests, so give nesting birds a wide berth and never disturb active nest sites.
- Create a brush pile to provide additional loafing or roosting opportunities.
- Keep cats indoors and support local cat roaming ordinances to protect cats as well as ground-feeding thrashers.
- Keep bird baths clean, changing the water no less often than every two days to prevent mosquito eggs from hatching.